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MARCO, IN HIS OVERPOWERING SURPRISE AND HORROR AT MEETING HIS WIFE, FLUNG HER OFF ROUGHLY!

COWSLIP BALL.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"Ah, Gregory! It is you. I thought I could not be mistaken. Are you off by this train too?"

"Yes. I am going down to Maidenhead to stay with an uncle and aunt and a whole tribe of cousins, for a week or two, at a house called the Grange, a mile or two up the river."

"The Grange at Redbourne! Why, of course that is the place Sir James Gregory has lately bought. Is he a relation?"

"Yes, my uncle, my father's brother."

"Well, if this isn't a queer coincidence, by Jove! My uncle is vicar of Redbourne, and I am going down there too. I've been staying with him for the last ten days, and only came up on Friday for a little relief—too much church-going on week-days to suit me."

"Ah, I should not imagine that sort of thing was much in your line, Pownall."

"You're right there. I must confess I should find it a ghastly chill hole for long, but the old man—he's my great-uncle by the way, and is not likely to be Vicar of Redbourne much longer—has a nice tidy little sum of money invested in good securities. He is a widower with neither chick nor child to come after him, except myself, and there is an old servant down there, worthy old soul no doubt, but to my certain knowledge she has a good many relations that she brings to see the old fellow, and there is no saying what may happen in such cases, you know."

"No, indeed, you are right there. An old cousin of mine died last year. She had left each member of the family heir to her property, hinting it was very small, at some time or other, and finally the one name mentioned in her will was that of a perfect stranger, a girl who had helped her over when she fell down in crossing a street. Hard lines on the family that, wasn't it?"

"It was indeed! That's our train, I fancy, the middle platform. Hullo, porter—what have you done with that box of tricks of mine? Hope it's safe in the van, and no heavy box on the top of

it. I am taking the old gentleman a few plants for his garden—he's great in that line, and delicate little attentions of that sort pay, you know. Smoking carriage for you, of course, Gregory!" And the speaker got into a first-class compartment.

For a moment the other hesitated, looking as though he meant to follow, then drew back with a decision that, under the circumstances, was not far from heroic.

"A smoking-carriage, certainly, my dear fellow—but not first-class. I'm not such a Croesus as you are, you know, and I have made up my mind to economize a little if possible while I am on leave this time, so I have taken a third-class ticket—see you again at Maidenhead, perhaps," and, with a nod, Captain Kenneth Gregory walked away in search of a third-class smoking-compartment, a little flush of colour showing under his bronzed skin.

The other, by name Markham Pownall, a young man of property and independent means, to whom such an idea as travelling anything but first-class probably never presented itself, half-rose from the seat he had already taken—the one nearest the window with his back to the engine,



and made as though he would follow his companion, but thought better of it, and let himself sink once more on to the comfortable padded cushion.

The two were acquaintances merely, and knew very little about one another. Captain Gregory's regiment was just then stationed near London. Mr. Pownall had rooms in Half Moon-street, and they had met several times lately at the houses of mutual acquaintances, and got to be fairly intimate in a surface sort of way; but neither knew much of the other's family belongings.

Markham Pownall had come into a good property and a considerable income at the unexpected death of his only brother, two years ago.

Before that he had called himself an artist, and spent a considerable portion of his time abroad—mostly in Paris; but since his accession to fortune, though he shared a studio with a friend, it was not many hours that he spent there.

He was a favourite in society naturally, and, in fact, made himself very agreeable. It was only now and then that some one ventured to disagree with the general opinion about him.

Once in a way a woman would say she fancied Mr. Markham Pownall thought just a little too much of himself, or an old man would suggest that the young fellow spent more than he was justified in doing perhaps. It must be a good income to stand all that, and old Pownall had not been a millionaire. But probably Mr. Markham Pownall knew his own business best.

As for Captain Gregory, "income" was a grand term to use for the very small yearly sum he had beyond his pay. It just enabled him to get along somehow, and that was all.

His father had been a captain in the Royal Navy, and had not found it easy to save even that amount for the son who was the one joy of a life burthened by a secret and never-ending trouble.

As to expectations, Kenneth could not be said to have any worth speaking of, unless his godfather and old and kind friend, Admiral Orme, should leave him a few hundreds.

His uncle, Sir James Gregory, was a rich man, he was a very well-known and successful physician; but then he had a large family of his own.

Nevertheless, on the whole, Kenneth Gregory had found life by no means unpleasant.

He liked his profession, and had thoroughly enjoyed the one little bit of active service he had seen in Africa. He was not perhaps particularly clever, but he had fair abilities on the whole. He was a good-hearted, honest young man, perfectly straight in all his ways.

His superior officers liked and trusted him, and his men adored him. It was tiresome doubtless, the necessity for such great care, or for constant periods of economy; still, things were not bad in general, and, as yet, whatever love affairs Captain Gregory had indulged in had been of a slight, perfunctory character. He had never yet carried serious alarm into the bosoms of mothers anxiously watching their pretty daughters.

No girl had found herself forced to draw back from his ardent wooing, and hint gently that she could not possibly wait for him till he was a colonel.

The momentary feeling of dislike of his third-class accommodation and companions of the bucolic type passed very soon, and it was the usual sunny-tempered, whole-hearted Kenneth Gregory who stepped out on the Maidenhead platform—of course, before the train quite stopped—to be surrounded instantly by a bevy of cousins of all ages and sizes, big and little, boys and girls.

"Hullo! what a tribe of you! Don't strangle me quite, Lollie! at least, not till I get hold of my belongings. Now, you boys, you can carry some of these things while I go after my portmanteau."

With some difficulty he collected all his properties, then turned to the eldest of the party—a girl of sixteen or so.

"Now then, Sibyl, what's the next move?"

As he spoke Markham Pownall passed him with a nod.

"See you about some day, Gregory, I dare say."

"All right. I'll look you up if I may."

"By all means—shall be delighted."

"Will you mind walking to the Grange, cousin Kenneth? Mother said I was to tell you she was very sorry, but father went to town after all to-day, though he said he would not, and the carriage will have to meet the next train for him, as well as fetch Maggie and Miss Capel from the Leighs, and she could not manage to let it meet you as well."

"Of course, I shall like the walk best—but what about my goods and chattels?"

"John, our gardener's boy—do you see him standing there?—he will look after them till the carriage comes and see them all put in."

"All right, let's go and speak to the young gentleman, and then put our best foot forward. How far is it to this lovely new home of yours? After all I have heard I am prepared for any amount of magnificence—a regular palace, in fact, with enormous lawns sloping down to the river, dozens of boats of all sizes, and swans by the hundred."

"Oh, cousin Kenneth, what nonsense! I am sure we did not say all that. It is very jolly, really, but not so very big, and there are only two boats, and one very old wheezy swan."

"I told you that in my letter. I know I did. I don't believe you read it."

"And so did I."

"And I."

A chorus of indignant voices rose, all declaring that he had not read their owners' letters. The Grange was a new possession of the Gregory family.

After proving conclusively, by various quotations that he actually had read the letters, he at last got an answer to his question as to how far it was from the station.

Nearly two miles by the road, but there was a short cut across some fields farther on, if he did not mind cows.

"Wasn't that Mr. Pownall—Dr. Holder's nephew that is staying with him just now—the man who spoke to you, I mean?" said Bob.

"Yes. That is if Dr. Holder is vicar here. He told me he was staying here with his uncle."

"Was it? Oh! I do wish I had noticed him. Maggie and Miss Capel are always talking about him; they have seen him at lots of tennis-parties."

"Who is Miss Capel, Sibyl? I don't seem to know her name. Have I ever met her in Harley street?"

No—at least I don't think so. She is a new friend of Maggie's. She got to know her last winter when she stayed so long near Leeds."

"What is she like?"

"She is very—" began Sibyl, but many voices broke in upon her sentence. Apparently Miss Capel was a subject of general interest and approval.

Finally little Lollie said, in her deliberate baby accents, her tone full of solemnity,—

"And she can make cowslip-balls."

"And so you really don't know how to make a cowslip-ball, Captain Gregory?"

"Indeed I do not, Miss Capel; in fact, until yesterday, I am not quite sure that I should have recognised a cowslip had I seen one. I am afraid botany is not my strong point."

"May I ask what is your strong point—or perhaps I should say your strongest—for according to your cousins, generally, you are a man of universal knowledge and capacity."

"I really should not like to say. Suppose I leave it for you to find out for yourself, Miss Capel. My aunt told me this morning that you have promised to stay on for some time longer, so you will have plenty of opportunity of studying my character and finding out my capacities."

The two speakers were sitting comfortably on the trunk of a tree under the shade of a big elm that stood in the corner of one of the fields near the Grange.

The green slopes below them were dotted with

the stooping figures of the children engaged in the engrossing employment of cowslip-picking. Even the youngest of the family, a toddling mite of two years old, was there under Sibyl's guidance.

Cousin Kenneth's remark that he was tired and his legs were too long for cowslip-picking had been accepted as a reasonable excuse after some demur; and it was decreed that he and Miss Capel, who had volunteered to be of this party, should make the balls as fast as sufficient cowslips were brought them. He was nothing loth. It was not two days yet since Maggie had introduced him to her friend, but already he was of opinion that not one of the children's words of praise and approval had been too much—no adjective could be possibly superfluous in her case—in truth they could all be summed up in the one word "perfect."

In fact, for the first time in his life Kenneth Gregory had fallen in love suddenly and strongly.

He was scarcely aware of it himself, yet it had not struck him as odd that he had felt a distinct sensation of relief when Maggie announced that she could not possibly go cowslip-picking that morning, but Molly might if she liked.

It was quite true that his legs were too long for comfortable picking, but, as for the tiredness, well, that was certainly not very great, at any rate, still it was quite enough to add to the enjoyment of sitting there. It was a lovely May day; above them was a clear blue sky flecked with little white clouds that had in them no hint of future rain. Beyond the field, along the valley, ran the shining river silvery white in the sunshine. Trees, bushes, were all in their first freshness of spring foliage, a lovely mass of yellow greens and tender, pale browns with here and there a fir tree, or a darker tinted brown copper beech to throw out the paler colours in relief. It was just a day on which to be thankful for the mere fact of living; and somehow for a while a silence fell on the two sitting there.

At last Molly gave a deep-drawn sigh and turned to her companion.

"It is very lovely. I really don't think Sir James could have chosen a nicer place, and Maggie says it was quite by chance. It will be hard for them all to go back to Harley Street in the winter."

"I don't know about that. The country is apt to be a little dreary about November, Miss Capel. Have you always lived in a town?"

"My home is just outside Leeds; at least, it was there, but now—" she broke off with a sigh.

Captain Gregory knew that she had lost the grandfather with whom she lived lately, so said nothing, and a moment after the first cowslip-picker came up with a big bunch.

"Won't that be enough for a ball, Miss Capel? Do say yes. Haven't I been quick?"

"You have indeed, Dora! You can put them down on the ground—like that—in a heap. Now, Captain Gregory, where is that ball of string of which you took charge?"

Kenneth produced it, and they proceeded to arrange how the work could be best carried on.

He was to hold the piece of string while Molly strung the sweet-smelling, yellow branches along it.

"Those stalks are too long, Dora. See! break them off like that; now hand them to me as fast as you get them ready."

Kenneth did as he was told, quickly grasping the secret of the manufacture, and watching the deft, gloveless fingers with great satisfaction, as they rapidly filled up the string he held.

Cowslip balls have to be tied, as everyone knows, and in helping to tie knots fingers must touch now and then.

Perhaps never before in his life had Captain Gregory so much enjoyed being initiated into the mysteries of a new art.

He was quite sorry when at last each member of the party, including the baby, had been supplied with a big, irregular-shaped sweet-scented ball of soft yellow and green.

"Now you must make one for cousin Kenneth," said a chorus of voices.

"And one for herself, too."

So Miss Capel proceeded to carry out their

directions, and complete her task by making two little elegant balls, of all the best bunches eagerly brought by the children. These she finished off with a neat little loop of string. One she fastened into the brooch she wore at her neck.

"I shall be able to enjoy the scent best like that," she said.

Then she handed the other to her assistant.

"There, Captain Gregory, I hope you consider you have profited by your lesson."

"I do, indeed," he answered, with a look full into the clear eyes raised to his.

"And you think you could make a cowslip-ball all by yourself now, Cousin Kenneth?"

"Yes, I think I might perhaps manage such a difficult achievement, Lollie; but I would rather be helped, if I could ensure such assistance as I have had this morning—it is not easy to tie knots alone, you know. And now it is about time to go home, I think. Sibly, don't you think that boy of yours would like a ride back on my shoulder?"

That evening when Maggie Gregory went to her friend's room for the usual confidential talk before going to bed, she found Miss Capel unusually silent at first, till she happened to mention her cousin; then Molly looked up with sudden interest.

"Tell me a little about him, Maggie. I suppose his father was Sir James's brother?"

"Yes, his only brother. He was a captain in the Navy, you know. I think he was rather sorry Kenneth would be a soldier, but he was so fond of him. I fancy, but I am not sure, and when I asked mother once, she said it would be no use to tell me all about it—still I feel almost certain his mother is alive. There was something wrong about her, I know."

"Is he rich—your cousin, I mean?"

"Rich!—no, indeed, he has only just enough to live on, father says. Mother is always telling him—no fun, you know—that he ought to marry some one with money. Molly! didn't you tell me once that you would be rich some day! Why, you are the very person!"

"Nonsense, Maggie! Do you suppose, for one moment, I would marry anyone who came after my money—and besides, I shall never be nearly rich enough for a man like Captain Gregory. Soldiers are so extravagant, and want so much."

The last sentence was spoken in a careless tone, and she finished with a yawn.

"Don't you like Kenneth, Molly?" said Maggie, taking the hint, and rising to go.

"Oh, yes, I like him; he seems pleasant enough. I don't quite see why you are all so mad about him, that's all."

Left alone, Miss Capel, in spite of her apparent weariness, made no attempt to go to bed. She sat on, thinking, an expression coming into her face that was not at all like its usual open placid look.

Marian Capel had led a somewhat unusual life—a life in which money had not played a high or a worthy part, and it had left its traces on her in a way.

Her great-grandfather had made an enormous fortune in the North, that had led to all sorts of family complications. Money, of course, had attracted to itself money, but it had not brought happiness in its train. There was a strain of suspicion in the Capel family—ill-assorted marriages, not by any means love-matches—unjust wills—suggestions of unfair influence—hard words of all sorts had been rife amongst them. Her own mother had been of a different mould altogether. Beautiful, full of romance, she had married for love alone, and had been adored by her husband as she thought. The shock of finding out that even in his love she was second to his business—his unceasing accumulation of wealth—in a sense killed her.

Within a few years of the birth of her only child she sank into permanent ill-health; and though she lived till Marian was nearly grown up, it was but a half-hearted depressed kind of existence she led—her one comfort the daughter whose beauty was the pride of her last years.

She was not a wise woman, and naturally the girl learned a good deal of her mother's disap-

pointments—connecting them with the father, who rarely had time to take much notice of her.

A year after Mrs. Capel's death there came a sudden and terrible business crisis, and in a few short hours ruin stared her husband in the face. Possibly he might have battled through it, but his health failed suddenly. He had never been robust, and in a few weeks Marian was a penniless orphan.

Fortunately her grandfather was still alive. He was the eccentric member of the Capel family—there is generally one such. As a young man he had gone in for money-making and business with the same capacity as the rest of the family; then suddenly he had given it all up—realized his property—and was now living a secluded life, devoting himself to his garden and his books in the big house he lived in not far from Leeds.

His invitation to Marian to make her home with him was sincere, though not perhaps very tenderly expressed; and, when her first sorrow was over, she learned to be very happy and contented in the rambling old house, sharing in her grandfather's pursuits and amusements.

She had been at school with Maggie Gregory for a year as a child. They met by chance at Scarborough, and it was after that she at last persuaded her grandfather to let her ask Maggie to stay with her.

Old Mr. Capel had been dead now about nine months. By his will Marian was his sole heiress, and it she meant what she said about her friend's cousin, she must have had very exaggerated ideas as to what he would need in the matter of a rich wife.

She was not of age certainly—her money would not be her own for another nine months or so—and in the meantime was in the hands of trustees, but even a soldier might be satisfied with three or four thousand a year, one would think.

When, after a lengthened time of reflection, Miss Capel rose and began to prepare for bed, she murmured to herself,—

"Well, I am very glad he does not know how rich I shall be in six months. What a good thing I never told Maggie how much money I shall really have; and he can't find out."

Thereby proving how confiding and foolish women can be on such matters, for it never struck her that Captain Gregory could easily discover, if he so chose, the extent of her fortune. And thus it happened that, content with this certainty, in spite of her professed small amount of liking for Kenneth, they became day by day more happy and contented in each other's society. And they were thrown very much together, for, to tell the truth, Maggie Gregory had an admirer of her own who very much engrossed her at the numerous boating or tennis parties that were just beginning with the early summer. Not that cousin Kenneth neglected the children. When he was about the house or garden, or in the fields, he was invariably surrounded by a crowd; but they had discovered that the surest way to get hold of him was to make sure of Miss Capel—or rather Molly—as they all called her now.

And at all the parties and afternoons the one drawback to Captain Gregory's happiness was the way in which Mr. Markham Pownall, too, devoted himself to Miss Capel.

He was often at the Grange now, and, of course, being an acquaintance of Kenneth's, he soon got on a footing of intimacy, and, as a matter of fact, he had known Molly sooner.

It soon became evident to all the neighbourhood that both young men were at least very deeply smitten with Miss Capel's charms, and, with the proneness to speculation in some minds, bets were taken on the subject as to who might be successful.

That she had a little money was taken for granted. Penniless maidens don't generally dress as she did; but of the amount of her fortune no one was aware—at least as far as Molly herself knew.

She had not heard a remark made carelessly to Captain Gregory by Mr. Pownall the very morning after their meeting in the train, before either had begun to succumb to Miss Capel's charms.

"That girl has some money, I believe, Gregory.

Better have a try for her. I would myself if I knew how much."

As he certainly did have a try shortly afterwards, Kenneth might have fancied that he had perhaps found out; but, to tell the truth, such an idea never entered his head. He had totally forgotten the words.

That Molly had some money he knew from Maggie; but the idea of filly lucre in any connection with his goddess was utterly distasteful to him. It was the one thing that kept him from asking the decisive question.

But at last it became a matter of days—even hours—only.

One more walk with the children, one more evening on the river, and then the sun would set for ever. Molly Capel was going up to stay with some friends in London the next day!

Should he speak?

Markham Pownall was coming to dinner, and they were to go for a final row afterwards; and for the last few days Molly had most decidedly encouraged him.

To tell the truth, the silent intensity of Kenneth's devotion was a little trying, sometimes, and Markham's clever talk was a decided relief, especially as Molly was a little bit doubtful as to the state of her own heart; and that fatal money question was still in her mind. She could not quite give herself up to full belief in Captain Gregory's ardour.

He must marry some one with money, and to the other it was presumably a matter of indifference.

The hours of that last day passed rapidly. Evening came, bringing Mr. Pownall; dinner was hurried over, then they all started for the river. As it chanced, Kenneth and Molly were last, the rest of the party were a little on in advance. From the field where the cowslips had been gathered a gate opened on to the tow-path, and the boat-house was some yards farther up the river.

Usually there was no one about; but this evening, on the grass under the hedge lay a woman—a wretched, ragged-looking specimen of her sex, with bleared eyes and tangled grey hair under her dilapidated bonnet.

Probably the others had not noticed her as she lay; but as she caught the sound of Captain Gregory's voice she sat up, and a dull light came into the sudden eyes.

He glanced at her as she passed, and with a sort of spasm she held out both her hands, uttering a sound that might have been a wild attempt at his name.

Molly grasped his arm, and instinctively his hand sought hers.

"What is it? Are you frightened? Poor wretch! she can do you no harm."

Turning back, he glanced at the woman, then threw her half-a-crown—that grasp was worth it and more.

"It is very silly of me, I know; but beggars like that always frighten me. I am a dreadful coward in many ways."

"Molly," he said, suddenly grasping her hand that, still trembling, rested on his arm, "you know I love you. Won't you be my wife, and let me save you from being frightened ever any more?"

There was a moment's silence. From a few yards before them came the sound of voices. Mr. Markham Pownall's amongst them. The boats were being got ready. Then came a shout,—

"Are you coming, Gregory?"

But Kenneth did not move. They were hidden from the others by a big bush.

At last Miss Capel raised her eyes to her lover.

"Yes, if you like," she said, shyly, and was answered by a kiss.

After which the two found it a little difficult to join the rest of the party, with an outward appearance of calm at any rate.

"Now then, make haste! Which boat are you going in to-night, Miss Capel?" cried one of the young men of the party.

Of course Molly and her lover managed to be together somehow, and in a very few minutes the sound of the gay voices and laughter, the plash of four pairs of sculls in the water, was

sounding fainter and fainter; while behind them, her back towards the fast disappearing boat, the wretched recipient of Kenneth Gregory's half-crown hastened as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her along the path towards the nearest public-house.

Muttering and murmuring to herself she went along, and, strange to say, through all the muttering there ran a sound that seemed like a faint echo of his name!

CHAPTER II.

THAT last evening it seemed to rain proposals at the Grange. Maggie Gregory came back from the river expedition an engaged young lady, and during the hour's dancing, in which the party indulged later on, Mr. Markham Pownall found an opportunity of making Miss Capel an offer of his hand and heart.

Molly listened, her colour coming and going, her eyes downcast. He thought he was sure of success, and made an attempt to take her hands, speaking her name tenderly. He was really desperately in love, besides other reasons.

But Molly drew back at that.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Pownall, truly very sorry. I would not have let you speak if I could have helped it; but—I am already engaged."

"Engaged! already engaged!" Mr. Pownall exclaimed, and there was anything but a pleasant expression on his face at the moment. "Don't tell me you are engaged to that fellow Gregory!"

"Why should I not tell you so, Mr. Pownall?" and Miss Capel raised her head proudly. "It is the truth—I am engaged to Captain Gregory. Have you anything to say against it?"

"Certainly not—if you are content; that is, of course, enough for me—but—by Jove! he's a lucky beggar—a man with scarcely a rap to call his own beyond his pay. He has played his cards well."

"What do you mean, Mr. Pownall?"

Miss Capel asked the question with heightened colour.

Markham looked at her curiously.

"What do I mean? Why, of course, he knows you are an heiress—but—"

"How can he possibly know it?"

Molly's voice had a sharp sound in it which Mr. Pownall was quick to note.

"Found it out, as other people do, no doubt, Miss Capel. It is easy enough, you know. I tell you honestly, I saw a mention of your grandfather's will in the paper. Probably he did the same. As to me—by my poor brother's unexpected death, you know, I am a rich man—in a way, that is. I hope you will acquit me of any interest in the matter. I hold that it is far better the wife should have some money of her own, in any case, and that it should be settled on her—but—"

He broke off suddenly. He had been speaking slowly and deliberately, watching the girl's face as he did so.

"All is fair in love and war" was Markham Pownall's theory. There was something to be gained, perhaps, still—matters were not quite hopeless. A lover's quarrel might, after all, leave the way clear for him. And, at least, it must be said that he really did believe that Kenneth Gregory knew very well he was wooing an heiress. Had he not himself told him she had some money, at any rate?

Molly looked across the room at that moment to where her lover stood, talking to Sibyl, with whom he had been dancing. He caught her glance, and smiled at her in return.

Something in the smile, the whole look of the upright, manly figure, made her feel suddenly ashamed of herself?

What was she doing, listening thus, allowing herself to be affected by another man's words about the lover to whom, only a few short hours before, she had pledged herself?

Determined she turned away from the subject, and with a bow to Mr. Pownall, walked deliberately across the room to Kenneth.

Nevertheless, again and again the thought recurred to her, and, do what she would, she could not stifle the memory of those words and their invidious poison.

"Found it out, as other people do."

If Mr. Markham Pownall had seen her grandfather's will in one of the papers, why not Captain Gregory? Why was she so sure he did not know it?

She was not quite so mad as to doubt that he loved her still.

At this point she invariably stopped short, a mist before her eyes, a choking sensation in her throat.

Then her better self reassured itself. She would not doubt him—and yet—surely it would be better to ask him, to settle the matter at once.

Nevertheless the question was still unasked when she started for London the next day.

She had told her news to kind Lady Gregory, and been kissed and congratulated; but she had begged that it might not be publicly made known till she had left. Maggie was going up to London for the day, and Kenneth escorted them both.

The friends to whom Miss Capel was going in Kensington were also relations. She was perfectly free to marry as she pleased when she came of age in six months time; still it is as well to be on good terms with relations if possible.

In appearance and manner Captain Gregory was at any rate an eligible lover, and, unless he heard to the contrary, he was to present himself in Argyle-road during the evening for inspection.

He would not try to get back to Maidenhead that night, but would sleep at his own rooms. He had not yet arrived at a calm enough stage to decide what, under present circumstances, he should do with the remainder of his leave.

Molly herself was only to remain a fortnight in town. Lady Gregory had very kindly said something about going back then, but he knew that would be a little inconvenient on account of other visitors. Still these little details did not trouble the blissful lover much, as he did his best to get through the hours before he could see his darling again.

Maggie had her own affairs to attend to and did not want him.

As he strolled slowly out of the Paddington station after having put the two girls at their own request into a cab, someone brushed quickly past him.

"Surely that's Pownall, he must have come up in the train with us—odd I didn't see him; he seems in a hurry."

At that moment a woman passing spoke to him in a language he did not understand. She was young and had once been very handsome, with big black eyes and brilliant colouring. She looked tired and worn, and was carrying a heavy child of a year old or so, while two other black-eyed little mortals dragged at her skirts.

Captain Gregory shook his head.

"Ne comprends pas," he said at a venture. He was not much of a linguist—still, he could make shift to get on a little in French.

The dark eyes lighted up.

"Ah! mais monsieur parle Français, et peut me dire peut-être où je trouverai cette adresse qu, une bonne dame a écrite pour moi."

Kenneth glanced at the speaker—there was a fierce, determined expression about the face, but she did not look bad, and on her ungloved hand he caught sight of a wedding-ring.

He took the dirty little bit of paper she held out, but could make nothing of the address, except a word at the end that might be meant for Maidenhead.

He said it—pronouncing the word very clearly, and a look of intelligence came into the woman's face at once.

With some difficulty he at last made out that she wanted to go to Maidenhead, "où j'é-père trouver mon mari," she explained.

Kenneth made out that her husband had been living in London lately, and had given her an address to write to at a post-office. She had succeeded in making her way there, and had learnt that all his letters were now being sent

on to Maidenhead, and one of the clerks gave her the address, but she had held it in her hot hands till it was impossible to read anything but the last word, and was evidently beginning to despair, though she had actually succeeded in finding her way to the arrival platform at Paddington from the post-office which she said was in "Picca-dilli."

Captain Gregory, feeling in a generally benevolent mood that day, willing to help all the world if possible, good-naturedly took her and the children round to the right booking-office—the woman explained that she had plenty of money, and saw the three into the train, and then, going to the refreshment-room, he purchased a large bag of cakes and buns, and handed them in to the tired children.

Little did he guess, as he waved his hand in farewell, how that woman would be mixed up with his future life, neither did it for one moment strike him—why should it?—that it was a momentary distant glimpse of her and the children that had sent Mr. Markham Pownall flying past Captain Gregory, to whom, after the departure of the two girls, he had intended to speak, or that Mr. Pownall was now using every endeavour to convince himself that he must have been mistaken.

Never would she be able to undertake such a journey.

"I know her well; in spite of all her fierceness. Lisa is a coward at heart, and always said she would never cross the sea."

So firmly convinced did he feel of this that at last he nearly did succeed in forgetting. He spent his afternoon calling at several houses where he was greatly appreciated, dined with some friends, and finished up at the theatre, to which he escorted a young and pretty cousin.

"It is such a lovely night, mamma," the young lady announced as they left the theatre—it was the Savoy. "I do so want to see the moon shining and the river. Markham says he will take me along the embankment as far as Westminster."

"It won't take long, aunt Minnie. By the time you have waited ten minutes for the carriage, we shall be half-way there. Tell your man to draw up at the top of the steps."

The indulgent mamma agreed, and Mr. Pownall drew his cousin's hand on his arm. He was always ready to oblige pretty girls.

Captain Gregory had never yet found hours pass so slowly as those five or six before he could present himself in Argyle-road, but at last he found himself being shown upstairs.

There was a silence about the house that rather surprised him, and he was taken into an empty drawing-room.

His heart sank a little as he waited, though he could not have told exactly why, but at last there was the sound of a soft rustle, and Molly came in.

She let him kiss her, then sitting by his side, his arm round her waist, she explained the reason of her solitude.

It seemed that tickets had been taken for the theatre that day, and though, when Molly told her news and said she expected her lover during the evening, her cousins volunteered to stay at home, yet she could not help seeing that it would be a great disappointment to them, and had at last persuaded them to go all the same. Their father had taken them, for they were young girls and could not well go alone, and their mother was a chronic invalid.

"Will you come and see cousin Sarah for a few minutes, Kenneth, in her own little sitting-room? She has a bad headache to-night, and is afraid of coming in here, but she very much wants to see you."

Of course Captain Gregory agreed at once, and Molly led him upstairs to what was really a dressing-room, but was arranged as a pretty little sitting-room for the invalid.

Cousin Sarah was kind enough, but there was something about her that gave Kenneth an unpleasant impression. One or two of her speeches sounded rather as if she thought Molly was throwing herself away; and there was a general tone of money in her talk that rather jarred.

They did not stay very long, for it was evident

that the invalid was really in pain. She shook hands with Kenneth and said she hoped to be downstairs next time he came. Then the lovers went back to the drawing-room, and Captain Gregory, with a sigh of relief, seated himself once more by Molly's side and tried to draw her towards him; but she would not let him, and sat upright, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on some object on the other side of the room.

There was a silence of some moments. Kenneth at last clearly recognised the fact—he had been dimly aware of it from his first sight of her—that there was something a little strange about his love that evening. All the time they had been upstairs Molly had had fits of absence, as though her thoughts had suddenly flown elsewhere. Had she something on her mind, perhaps?

"What is it, Molly? What are you thinking of so deeply? Is there anything wrong—anything I can mend, perhaps? Tell me, my darling. Don't let us begin by having secrets from one another?"

Molly looked up, facing him suddenly, her face flushing; then with sudden determination she spoke, and her voice sounded hard and cold somewhat.

"I want you to tell me something, Kenneth. When you asked me to marry you, did you know that I am rich—that I have money of my own?"

Captain Gregory was so surprised that for a moment he hesitated, and he, too, coloured a little. At last he spoke,—

"Yes, Molly; I knew you had some money. Someone told me; I forget who it was. If you had not, I should, much as I love you, dear, have scarcely felt right or justified in asking you to share my own very small fortune. I have very little besides my pay. I thought, of course, you knew that."

"Then you want to marry me for the sake of my money?"

Was it Molly herself who was speaking? It scarcely sounded like her voice!

Kenneth knew nothing of the suspicious Capel nature. He had no idea of all the cautions as to not allowing herself to be married for her money's sake that had been showered on the girl for the last few hours. The words were a bitter shock to him. He turned white now instead of red.

"Molly!"

His voice was full of pained reproach. It was all he could say. Then, as she still sat, her eyes fixed on the ground, he rose, and walked away.

He fully recognized the gravity of the situation now. What was he to do or say? Bitterly wounded as he was, how was he to answer her?

There was a long silence—then at last Molly spoke—her voice harsh with a touch of angry impatience in it.

"Why don't you speak—say something—tell me if it is the truth or not?"

Then at last Kenneth turned and faced her. His face was deadly white, and there was an expression not good to look at in his eyes. He was a good-tempered easy-going man on the whole, but he could be roused—and Miss Capel had done it effectively now.

"The truth! What do you mean? I have told you the truth. I knew you had money—and you—did not you know all about me and my circumstances? It was easily found out at the Grange, at anyrate. I am a Captain in the army, and have a very small income besides. Was it such a crime to be glad that in asking you to be my wife I was not condemning you to such a life of making the best of it as is the lot of many an officer's wife? If I had not known it—it would have been more honourable on my part to have gone away, I suppose; but I—" he paused a moment—a queer choking sensation in his throat.

Molly had risen too, now, and faced him. With her preconceived idea that he really knew—had known all along—the extent of her fortune—every word he uttered seemed to her but an acknowledgment of the truth of her suspicions.

Something in her expression stung Kenneth almost to fury—for the moment he believed that she had killed his love for her in a second.

"It is useless to say any more," he went on at a white heat now. "As a man of honour there is nothing else for me to do, Miss Capel: I release you from your promise. You are perfectly free again to marry whom you please. I only trust that you will warn your next unfortunate victim in time of what he may expect. Good-night and good-bye for ever!"

He went towards the door, opened it, and left the room without turning to her again.

Molly stood as he had left her—though his last words had sent a shiver through her whole frame.

Was he really gone? No—she heard his returning footsteps, surely!

Yes, she was right! With quick steps Captain Gregory crossed the room to his love's side.

Before Molly could realize the fact, his arms were round her—he was straining her to his heart—kissing her passionately. Then he held her away from him by both arms, looking with burning eyes into her face—compelling her to meet his glance.

"My love! my love! I could not part with you for ever like that—cruel as you have been to me. I will go now—it is better that I should, I know; but—if you are sorry after a bit—if you should think better of it—only let me know and I will come wherever you tell me, Molly. There are cowslips still—I saw some in a shop to-day—I shall never see them now without thinking of you. Send me a ball, just one little cowslip ball, and I shall know—I shall understand what it means—and come. I shall be at the Grange for a week."

He did not kiss her again, but with a last look into her eyes, he released her, and once more left the room. This time she heard the front door close with a bang, and knew he had really gone.

Then, with a low cry of his name, Molly Capel sank back amongst the sofa curtains and went into wild sobs and tears.

It was a veritable thunder-shower. When at last she grew calm, it seemed as though the tears had carried away with them all the suspicious, miserable thoughts of the past twenty-four hours for good and all.

"I will go and buy some cowslips as early as possible to-morrow morning," was her last waking thought that night.

But alas! no cowslips were to be had in Kensington for love or money the next morning. It was getting late for them, was the answer Molly received wherever she tried, and at last she was fain to be content with a promise from one of the flower-women at the station, that she would bring her a bunch without fail the next day.

"One day more would not much matter," Molly thought, though her heart ached a little at the idea of what Kenneth might be thinking.

She had found it somewhat difficult to get out alone, and also to explain why her lover was not coming to see her for a day or two.

That evening they were going to a big ball at the Town Hall.

Poor Molly! Little did she guess what news she would hear at that ball, though it was with a somewhat heavy heart that she dressed for it!

Captain Gregory did not quite know what he was doing when he found himself in the High Street after that last passionate parting with his love.

Without thinking, he got on the first omnibus that passed him, with a vague idea that he would go to his club.

Before he had grown quite clear in his mind again, he found himself in the City, the dome of St. Paul's standing out clear against the moonlit sky.

It was a little past ten o'clock. He got down at the bottom of Ludgate Hill, stood for a moment irresolute, then started towards the Blackfriars Station. His own rooms were at Kew. There would be a train in a few minutes, he would go straight back—not to the club, he was scarcely in a humour to meet friends just then. But when he neared the bridge, he too, like Markham Pownall's cousin, was taken with

a sudden fancy for a walk along the embankment—the train would do just as well at Westminster or Victoria, and it was not the last.

As he walked, something in the beauty of the scene—the long row of star-like lights, the soft-flowing, shining river at full tide, the fresh south-west breeze blowing in his face, soothed him and brought hope to his heart; he felt happier—almost convinced that the sign of love and confidence he had asked for would not be long delayed.

He had passed the Charing Cross Railway bridge, and was nearing Westminster, when suddenly a woman rose from one of the seats.

He was so close to her that he had to move aside to avoid her; for the moment he believed her to be drunk, then, to his amazement she called him by his name.

"Kenneth—Kenneth Gregory!" she said, and held out two skinny, shaking hands.

The voice was low and trembling, but there was no mistaking the words.

With a sudden sensation of horror, Kenneth recognized the miserable object to whom he had given the half-crown at Maidenhead only the day before.

He would have passed on, but she laid one skinny hand on his arm.

"Don't you know me, Kenneth? Your poor, old, miserable mother. Ah! you thought I was dead, I know—you and your father—but—wishes won't kill—though starvation may—and—"

In the sudden overpowering horror, the unfortunate young man had stood still, feeling himself turned into stone almost, but at the word "father" he gave a sudden recoil and shook off the hand on his arm.

"What do you want? I can't believe it—she is dead—my unhappy mother—she—" He grasped the woman roughly by the arm, and looked her full in the face in the moonlight; then dropped it with a groan.

In those drink-sodden features, was it possible that there lingered some likeness to the face—a faint memory of his boyhood—that he had last seen so many years ago.

"You must prove your words. How am I to be sure?" he said, making her sit down on the bench, and seating himself beside her.

A few minutes afterwards he rose; he had written the address she had given him in his pocket book.

"Here," he said, putting a sovereign into her hand.

For a moment, strange to say, there was no clutch of the shaking fingers.

Hopelessly lost and degraded as the wretched woman was, some faint remains of feeling stirred in her at that moment. She looked up at the tall figure standing in front of her—his face clearly visible now in the lamp-light—and tried to stammer something—Heaven knows what—words of some sort of repentance may be; but the voice died away in indistinct sounds, and she sank back, a huddled mass of rags and tatters, on the seat. And at that moment, while the man she claimed as her son stood trying to think what was best to be done—for instinct told him she spoke the truth—some one passing recognized him.

"What is the matter, Markham?" asked a girlish voice. "Why did you give such a start?"

"Did I, Ella?—I only caught my foot in something. See how effective that red light is across the river over there," Mr. Pownall answered calmly—and a moment after he managed to look back without letting his cousin see that he did so.

"It is the fellow—sure enough! What the devil is he doing down here with that hag at this time of night?"

It was as much as Mr. Pownall could do to answer his cousin, as she prattled on in her girlish voice, during the short remaining bit of their walk.

Curiosity about his neighbours' affairs was a strong characteristic of his, and in this, besides, who could tell to what a little useful knowledge might not lead?

Why was not Captain Gregory at Kensington that evening?

So the instant he had seen his cousin safely into the carriage with her mother, he ran down the steps again, and walked fast towards the place where he had seen his rival; but there was no tall figure now.

Kenneth had found the woman quite impossible to move, and had at last left her. He was to come the next day to the place she named, somewhere in the back slums of Lambeth; but go with him then and there to some refuge she would not.

And so, sick at heart with the two blows he had received that night, he left her and went on towards Westminster, passing Markham Pownall just as the latter turned to go down the steps again, then making his way, with a sort of blind instinct towards Victoria-street, walking as though he scarcely knew what he was doing, an expression on his face that would have gone to the heart of any true woman.

And on the bank where his had left her, the woman sat huddled up when Mr. Pownall reached it.

She was muttering rapidly to herself as he sat down by her side, and glanced at him suspiciously.

"I am afraid you are ill, my good woman. Can I do anything to help you?"

"Help me! you! Who are you?"

"I am a friend of that gentleman who left you just now," Markham said, at a venture.

"A friend of his—of Kenneth Gregory?"

"Yes, that is his name. How is it you come to know it so well, I wonder?"

Mr. Pownall spoke more to himself than to her; but a direct question would not have served his purpose better.

"Know his name! of course I do. Am I not his mother! his own mother! He says I must prove it for certain, and so I will to-morrow. It will be easy, easy—quite—"

Her voice died away again into indistinct mutterings. Markham rose, suppressing a prolonged whistle.

Some rumour as to Kenneth's mother had reached him. He understood now there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the conversation.

A momentary sensation of pity touched him; but the next instant he thought of Molly Capel. How would she like such a mother-in-law?

He made his way rapidly to the Charing Cross station. He was going to see a friend who lived close to Victoria—a man who gave late suppers, lived in luxurious rooms, and played cards for large stakes well on into the morning.

As Mr. Pownall got out of the train—rich as he was supposed to be, he never indulged in cabs when he was alone—he almost ran into Captain Gregory. Kenneth evidently did not see him. His face was still white, and his eyes had a dazed look.

Markham paused a moment. It was a Richmond train—he happened to have noticed it. He watched the Captain get into a smoking carriage, and sink into a corner seat. Then as the train moved on he turned away.

"Poor beggar!" he thought, "he looks hard hit!"

CHAPTER III.

It was indeed "hard hit." Two such blows must tell on a man, however strong he may be.

To be thrown over by one woman, and in another miserable degraded specimen of the same sex to discover the mother who had been the curse of his father's existence, and the black shadow over his own boyhood, are two strokes of fate very disconcerting.

In the silent sleepless hours of the night Kenneth Gregory pulled himself together somewhat, however, and when in the early morning—there was nothing to be gained by delay, better face the whole situation at once—he started for Lambeth, his face was not quite so pale, his manner had regained its usual composure.

He managed to avoid seeing anyone but his servant, and long before mid-day found himself crossing Lambeth Bridge. The tide was rising,

but on a bit of muddy bank still left uncovered he noticed an excited-looking group of people.

"Some poor wretch been found, I suppose!" The idea passed through his mind, but he thought no more of it.

The slums and courts of Lambeth are not easy places in which to find the address of one poor waif of humanity, though the woman had declared she was well-known.

She was always called "Madam," he had only to ask for her by that name if she were really his mother. She was a French-Canadian by birth—his father had married her at Quebec—that might account for the title.

Perhaps he did not ask the right kind of people, instinctively choosing the most respectable, but it was a long time before he came upon the first trace of the little court he wanted, going out of his way; he afterwards found, several times.

At last however he reached it, as hopelessly dirty and miserable-looking as a small collection of tumble-down cottages could well be. Most of the doors stood wide open. They were innocent of numbers, and he had to knock at several before at last he made out where "Madam" really lived.

It was true enough what she had said, she seemed to be well-known there at any rate. A miserable-looking object, ragged and tattered, smelling strongly of gin, came to the door in answer to his knock.

"Madam?" she echoed. "Did he want Madam?" she asked in a tone of curiosity, that showed she had not quite drunk away that feminine quality.

"Yes, I want to see her. She told me that she lives here, and if I asked for her by that name you would understand," and Kenneth put a shilling into the woman's hand as he spoke.

She looked at it, put it between her teeth, then answered him, a shade of what was meant for politeness in her tone,—

"Yes, she lives here, sure enough, Madam does; but she's not at home now, and what's more, she's not been in all right, for for many a night, as far as I know. She's been on a tramp somewhere—said as 'ow she was a going to pick flowers and sell 'em," and the woman gave a ghastly kind of laugh; and sent the shilling spinning in the air.

Kenneth stood, puzzled. What was he to do? Then a momentary sense of relief came to him. Was the story false after all, perhaps? the proofs the woman had promised to give him a delusion?

At that moment a boy came feasting round the corner into the court.

His feet were bare, his ragged trousers turned up; round his neck hung a battered old pair of boots, many sizes too large for him. He had evidently been mud-larking down by the river.

"Mother! mother!" he cried, in stentorian tones; "I'm blowed if the old lady 'aven't gone and drowned 'erself in the river!"

"Good Lord, Jimmy! Madam gone and drowned 'erself? Well, who'd 'a thought on that, now?"

"Maybe as 'ow some one else 'as 'ad a 'and in it. They say she's got a black mark round 'er neck, an' looks as 'though she'd been in a bit of a fight. Mother, look at the gentleman—is 'e agoin' to faint?"

Kenneth had staggered against the dirty door-post with a groan of horror.

"Looks like it, Jimmy. 'Ere, sir, 'old up a bit."

With a desperate effort Kenneth recovered himself, and stood upright again.

"Where have they taken her? Will they bring her here?"

"No, sir; they takes them poor wretches as falls in the river to the dead-house mostly—it's over there;" and she pointed vaguely across the court.

"The boy—can he show me? I will pay him."

Jimmy looked at his mother with a nod of comprehension; then, taking his boots from his neck, squatted on the flag-stone and proceeded to get his feet into them.

"Maybe you'd like to see 'er room, sir. It's

locked, but I've got the key," said the woman, scenting another shilling or two.

Kenneth followed her mechanically along the filthy passage to a door, which she unlocked.

The room smelt of dirt and mildew. In it was a miserable pallet-bed, covered with what looked like dirty rags. A chair and a broken-legged table were all there were of furniture besides, but, in one corner, stood a small square trunk that had been good once on a time.

Kenneth put his hand to his eyes for a second—a terrible pang seemed to strike him. Surely, he remembered that box. Had he not seen it, with his innocent, childish eyes, put on the top of the cab that had carried his mother away from him forever, as it seemed then?

He went towards it; opened it. It was empty nearly, but at the bottom lay a crumpled heap of papers. With a shudder he lifted them and smoothed one out.

It was a letter in his father's hand-writing, addressed to the miserable woman from whom he had never separated himself legally. A pathetic appeal to her, evidently written long after she had first left him, to let him help her to end her life better, at any rate.

Tears blinded his son's eyes as he read. Doubt was at an end. Here was the proof of which she had spoken. Torn across, but still kept with the letter, was a photograph of himself at about the age he was when that letter must have been written.

"Will you let me take these papers away with me?" he said, when he could command his voice. "I think this poor woman was—I know something about her—I fancy she was—a relation of mine. Of course I will pay you for them."

Half-an-hour afterwards all the contents of that box were in his possession, a sovereign the less in his pocket. It was lucky he had one with him.

Kenneth Gregory stood looking on the dead mother, whom in life he had never known but as a dim memory of neglected childhood, during the years of his father's absence at sea—an absence that had ended in the sailor's return to find his wife gone so one knew whither.

Never had the child been able to forget the terrible burst of grief he had witnessed that day, little as he had understood it at the time.

Now, as he stood looking at the haggard face of the dead woman who had caused it, it came back to his mind with terrible force.

Yet, as the man who had taken him into the place turned to lead the way out the son stopped and kissed the wrinkled forehead, thinking,—

"He would have forgiven her—why should not I?"

Kensington Town Hall is a charming place for a ball, and everyone agreed that this particular ball was one of the best that had ever taken place there.

Miss Capel rather demurred about going at first. She was still in mourning. Her white evening dress was too plain and simple for such a swell festivity. As a matter of fact, her quarrel with her lover made her disinclined for dissipation; but she was over-ruled, and when Mr. Markham Pownall arrived on the scene about eleven o'clock, almost the first person he recognised was Molly on the arm of a man with whom he had some little acquaintance; but, to his astonishment, he searched in vain for Kenneth's tall figure amongst the merry throng.

Molly greeted him somewhat coldly, but she did not refuse his request for a dance later on.

"Would it be impertinent of me to ask why Captain Gregory is not here this evening, Miss Capel?"

"He was not asked, I believe," she answered. "I came with the friends I am staying with in Argyle-road." She tried to speak carelessly, but something in her tone struck her companion as odd, and glancing at her quickly, he noted that her colour had risen.

"A screw loose already, it seems!" he thought, but for the moment he said no more, as they started again.

He was a perfect waltzer, and Molly could not help enjoying the dance.

"You will give me another later on, won't you,

Miss Capel?" he said, as he took her back to the lady who was chaperoning the three girls.

"What's up, I wonder?" he thought, as he watched Molly several times before their second dance came. "That's nonsense about the asking. Gregory could have got here somehow, I know well. He has a good many friends in Kensington, he told me, and I see some of them here. She does not look very unhappy. I wonder if she knows anything of that little interview last night? He would scarcely venture to tell her."

When at last he found himself again dancing with Molly it was nearly the end of the evening. The girl was tired, and after a turn or two was glad to sit down. Markham cleverly led the conversation back to Maidenhead and the river—and at last, coolly and calmly, as though it were the most natural thing to do, brought in Captain Gregory's name.

"I suppose he will go back there to finish his leave; they all seem very proud of him."

This time Molly did not colour, and her voice was quite under her own control as she answered,—

"I believe he went back there yesterday; he told me that he should."

"No, that he did not. I can answer for that at any rate," Markham Pownall came to a full stop; for once in a way he had spoken on impulse, without thinking of the effect his words might produce.

As he saw the look of surprise in Molly's eyes, a sudden idea flashed into his mind. He was in love, desperately in love; as far as his nature would allow; he was in very considerable money difficulties too, carefully hidden though they were from the world as yet. It was evident that there had been at least a lover's quarrel of some sort; now, surely, was his chance!

Banishing with an effort the small scruples that assailed him, he went on, quietly,—

"I beg your pardon, Miss Capel—spoke without thinking—but I saw Captain Gregory late last night; and I know he could not have gone to Maidenhead."

Very cleverly he managed to infuse a slight tone full of meaning into his voice. He had gauged Molly Capel much more truly than his rival had, and learnt how to take advantage of the feeling of suspicion that had been engendered by her bringing up.

For a moment Molly sat, her eyes fixed on the ground, a tumult of feeling surging within her.

She knew well Mr. Pownall meant to imply something, and her heart beat fast as she tried to argue with herself.

He watched her intently, ready to avail himself of any speech on her part.

If only she could have believed thoroughly and truly in Kenneth, there would have been nothing to do but speak on some totally different subject or suggest joining the dancers again.

Molly half rose.

No! she would ask no questions—she would treat Mr. Pownall and his insinuations with contempt. To-morrow the cowslips will come, the asked-for pledge be made and sent.—Ah! where were they to be sent? Had he not said he would be at the Grange for a week? and yet he had not gone—and—

She sat down again and turned to Markham, who could scarcely keep a smile of triumph from his face.

It was the same hard, cold voice that had spoken to Kenneth Gregory the night before that came now from her set mouth.

"May I ask where you saw Captain Gregory, Mr. Pownall? I conclude you mean something by the way you speak."

"I saw him on the Embankment—near Westminster Bridge, Miss Capel; and very much surprised I was—as you may imagine."

"On the Embankment!" echoed the girl. "I thought you meant at a club or somewhere—card-playing—or—"

"Losing more money than he can afford—or drinking more than he should—you mean that, Miss Capel, don't you?" Markham said, reading her like a book. "No, Captain Gregory does go to his club, I know, and is fond of a game, but he

was not there at any late last night; he was engaged very differently. I must explain, Miss Capel. I had been at the theatre with my aunt and cousin Ella. My cousin asked me to walk with her a little way along the Embankment, so that she might see the river and Westminster Abbey by moonlight."

"Yes; and Captain Gregory—had he been to the theatre, too—what was he doing?"

"Probably—he was escorting a lady."

Calmly and coolly Mr. Pownall uttered that deliberate lie.

There was a pause, and a dead silence several minutes.

Markham Pownall's heart beat a little fast as he waited for the result of his final throw. What would the girl say or do? Would she ask if the "lady" were so low young? His thought flew back to the grey-haired old hag he had left crumpled up on that bench. She had once been a lady, doubtless, too.

At last Molly raised her bent head, and he could see how pale her face was. They were practically alone in their chosen corner just then; the hall was emptying fast. In the distance Mr. Pownall caught sight of Miss Capel's chaperone looking round with searching glances. It was time for his last card.

With a sudden movement he succeeded in taking Molly's hand in a tight warm clasp, and his voice, as he spoke, had a ring of what sounded like true passion in it.

"Miss Capel—Molly; forgive me—perhaps I ought not to speak; but I love you, you know it, I told you; but how much it would be impossible to say—at least enough to wish that you may be happy in your choice. I may be wrong, but I cannot think you are a woman to be satisfied with half a heart. As for him—" he paused.

Molly raised her head, and looked him full in the face at last.

"Mr. Pownall, I am not engaged to Captain Gregory any longer. We parted last night—for ever."

The heart of the man listening to her gave a bound of fiendish delight. This was better than his fondest hopes—the way was nearly clear for him then—still it was better to be on the safe side.

A pathetic story of a disgraced mother succoured by a tender-hearted son might perchance reach Molly. Mr. Pownall knew by experience women were little to be trusted in emotional matters. It was better to be on the safe side, and give the departed lover a chance of not being quite so black as it was evident the girl thought.

"You will not expect to hear me say I am sorry on my own account, Miss Capel; but for him, at any rate, I am. And—you made me tell you what I saw; but it was only a passing glimpse—it may be that he was too late for the last Maidenhead train—and the lady was an old friend of his."

"Possibly," Molly answered, rising at last. "Anyhow, Mr. Pownall, it does not matter to me now, I am not likely to see Captain Gregory again."

She thought it generous of him to try and give a possibly favourable explanation of his rival's doings, but, young and innocent as she was in many ways, she was yet aware that the Embankment, late at night, was scarcely a place for gentlemen to meet old lady friends.

Miss Capel had read a good deal. She was nearly one-and-twenty; in learning to be suspicious as to the evils of money, she had learnt other things too. She had heard and seen nothing in Kenneth Gregory's sayings and doings to make her think him anything but a high-minded gentleman; still—it was as well she had not sent that cowslip-ball, perhaps—better leave things as they were!

This was what she came to after many hours' consideration of the matter, but the final result was not arrived at without many tears. And when, during the next morning, a message was brought her from the flower-woman that there were no cowslips to be had that day at Covent Garden, it seemed as though Providence itself had shown the rightness of her decision.

She shrank somewhat from telling her relations, naturally, but even that difficulty was solved before the morning came to an end.

Just as they were all sitting down to lunch, a telegram was brought her. The one old and dear friend of hers and her mother's, a lady who had been a generous companion to her and her mother, who had helped to nurse the latter for all the last years of her life, was dying, it was supposed, and craved for a last sight of the girl she loved so fondly.

By night, Molly Capel was back at Leeds, glad to get away.

At the last moment she managed to blurt out the fact of the parting with her lover, leaving them all to any conjectures they pleased as to the cause.

Worn out with the dissipation of the night before and the sleepless early morning hours, she dozed almost all through her journey, and as last reached her destination, only too thankful when she got there to find that her dear friend was still alive—if possible, just a little better.

She rallied for a few days, and Molly scarcely left her night and day. She got strong enough to listen to all the girl told her with all her old interest, and it was not long before she heard the whole story of the brief, ill-fated engagement.

Her own experience of life in her youth had not been pleasant, but nevertheless it had never been from her that her pupil had learned suspicion of humanity in any form. She and her teaching had been the one great countermelting influence.

"He has a nice face, Molly darling," she said, looking at the photograph—a horribly ugly one in truth, taken at one of the river boating-parties. Molly, herself, and a good many of the Gregorys were in it too, but it so happened that Kenneth's face had been the only one to come out at all well. "I hope it was not all a mistake. He does not look like the kind of man to care for money only."

"But he said he would not have asked me to marry him if I had got no money at all."

"Yes, dear. It was honest of him, at any rate. Perhaps it is all for the best. Better find out now than later on; and, forgive me, Molly, I don't think you can have learnt to love him so very much to have asked that question just so soon as that. I was in love once myself, my dear."

The feeble hand was softly stroking the girl's head, as it lay on the couch within reach. "She put it so that she could talk with her face hidden."

"I don't know. I thought I loved him, but sometimes I fancy I shall never love anyone with my whole heart."

"I think you will, Molly—even if you don't find out that you love this one after all, and send him that cowslip-ball you promised. Dear, if that time ever comes, don't let your pride come in. I know what that can do, to my cost. I may be wrong, but I fancy you are not quite so hardened as you want me to think, and I should like you to marry someone who would take you away from this place. I have made good friends here, your mother above all. Many people have been kind to me, but there is too much money, and talk of money, amongst all you Capels—love is better after all."

She took up the photograph again and looked at it silently for some moments.

"Yes; he certainly has a nice, honest sort of face," she said again, as she laid it down close to Molly's head. After a moment or two, the girl took it up, and there was a long silence in the room.

The sick woman closed her eyes and dozed a little, waking after a moment or two. As Molly raised her head she saw the girl put the photograph to her lips, and felt a tear fall on her own hand. A smile hovered round the invalid's mouth as she fell into another little sleep.

Three days later she died; but almost in her last words to her beloved pupil she mentioned Kenneth Gregory, and said how much she would have liked to see him.

CHAPTER V.

THE foreign-looking young woman, with the heavy baby and the two little toddling black-eyed mites that Kenneth Gregory, in the kindness of his heart, had helped to find their way safely to the Paddington booking-office, reached Maidenhead before one o'clock.

To judge by the weight of the little bag the woman took from round her neck, she had no lack of money, though she had paid for her tickets in silver and copper pieces, taken one by one from her pocket.

Four or five sovereigns, a half-sovereign and some silver!

She and the children were alone in the carriage, and laying the baby down on the seat beside her, with a sigh of relief, she proceeded to count it. Then putting the gold back in the bag she hung it once more round her neck, and slipped the silver into her pocket.

The children, meanwhile, were contentedly nibbling away at the buns and cakes, chatting to one another in baby language that sounded like a mixture of French and Italian.

They were pretty little things—a boy and a girl—with brown eyes and clear olive complexions. The only thing at all fair about them was their hair, which was dusky brown and curly.

The baby, on the contrary, might well have been English entirely, with its pink and white complexion, blue eyes, and soft, pale gold locks.

The mother was dressed in black in the style of the French bourgeois class, and her clothes, as well as those of the children, were good of their kind.

She had a capable, vigorous look about her. Obviously it was only her want of knowledge of the language that had made her feel helpless in the bustling London streets.

Now that she had time to think again, and was no longer at the mercy of the pushing crowd, her face had an expression of calm strength and power very noticeable. She did not look like a woman it would be safe to injure or insult in any way.

On her brown, well-shaped left hand there was the unmistakable glitter of a wedding ring.

After a minute or two's contemplation of its own fat little fingers, and a futile attempt to extract nourishment of some sort from them, the baby began to cry. With a smile that for the moment altered her whole expression, its mother took it up, murmuring some fond nonsense in Italian, and put it to her breast.

It was very soon peacefully asleep; then she began to talk to the two little creatures on the seat opposite her, and they answered, chattering away as fast as their little tongues would allow, and the one word "*padre*" came from all three again and again. Evidently the father they were all going in search of was the one subject of conversation.

As each station was reached the woman looked out eagerly for the name, comparing it with the printed "Maidenhead" on her ticket; but before they had gone more than half of their journey, a gentleman got in who was obviously at once taken by the look of the little party.

He was quite an old man, in the dress of a clergyman, with a gentle, kindly face.

With an amused smile he listened to the children for some time, then spoke to the mother in very good French.

Her face lighted up instantly: he would certainly be able to tell her when she reached the station she wanted, and she answered his questions about the children's names, and where they had come from, without any hesitation.

They had come from Paris, and her husband was an artist; but when she tried to pronounce his name the gentleman could make nothing of it, neither could he read it on the torn, dirty bit of paper from which Captain Gregory had at least succeeded in finding out where she wanted to come to.

The old clergyman looked at her somewhat curiously. What was she socially? How did she come to be an artist's wife? She said he was an English gentleman!

There was something very taking in her

manner—a sort of natural refinement, though he did not for one moment imagine that she was a lady. As for the children, they were perfectly charming!

He asked her if she knew of any place to go to in Maidenhead while she looked for her husband.

"I live near there—about two miles off—at a place called Redbourne: perhaps I could help you. When did you last see your husband?"

About three months ago, she said. He always came to Paris every few months, and when he was not there he sent her plenty of money; but she wanted to be with him, and at last she had made up her mind to come without telling him. Something in her expression just then convinced her hearer that her faith in her husband was not very strong. He was poor when she married him; but now she thought he was rich, and—

She did not finish that sentence, but, if her face were to be believed, the husband was not much to be envied when she found him—he might expect bad times.

When the clergyman ventured to ask a question as to her native land, and why she was living in Paris, not Italy, a sudden blaze of light came to her eyes as she answered. Her father had been a patriot in the old days, and had been forced to fly for his life. He knew something of modelling. Later on he found his way to Paris, got mixed up with artists there somehow, and though he had never been very successful, still he had managed to make a living. He had been a gentleman, his daughter said, proudly; but, as quite an old man, he had married a Frenchwoman—a daughter of the people—and she was their only child. At his death she and her mother had found it hard to make a livelihood, and she herself had taken to being an artist's model.

It was easy then to guess how the marriage, which was evidently undisturbed as far as she was concerned, had come about. She was a handsome, fine-looking woman, in spite of the lines of care and anxiety visible on her face just now; she must have been beautiful in her early girlhood.

Before they reached Maidenhead the old man had told her one or two addresses of respectable people to whom she could go for lodgings, and ended by giving her his card and telling her to come and see him if she found her search more difficult than she expected, and he would do his best to help her.

He knew there were several artists staying about in the neighbourhood just then.

The name on the card was that of the Rev. John Holder. It was Mr. Markham Pownall's uncle to whom the woman had been speaking; and as the good man drove home in his little pony-carriage he was all the time trying to fit the name the woman called herself by to any of the artists he knew just then to be in the place. "Lisa Marco," that was what it sounded like, but he could think of no one whose name might be Italianized into that.

Mr. Markham Pownall went home from the ball very well satisfied on the whole with the turn affairs had taken. Without saying anything actually untrue, he had managed to leave an impression that in what he said he had been actuated by good motives, and he felt sure that he had placed an effectual bar in the way of anything like reconciliation.

He was a little taken aback the next afternoon, however, when, after troubling himself to manufacture an elaborate excuse for calling and asking for Miss Capel in Argyle-road, he was informed by the servant that the young lady had left suddenly that morning, and, she believed, had no intention of coming back again—at present, at least. She had gone back to Leeds in consequence of a telegram telling of some one's illness—an old friend.

The young ladies were out, and her mistress was not well enough to see anyone or be spoken to just then.

So he could not even get Molly's address. But it did not much matter; sooner or later he would find her again.

It was a lovely evening, he had no particular engagement. His uncle the Vicar of Redbourne, kept

an excellent table, and he was not far from Paddington Station—all which reasons induced him to jump into a hansom and take a ticket for Maidenhead when he reached the station. He was, in fact, still supposed to be staying there.

But when he got there Dr. Holder was out dining with the Gregorys. However, the cook, with whom Markham was a favourite, for she was gratified by his appreciation of her good things, very soon provided him with a very good dinner, though rather less elaborate than usual.

Mr. Pownall enjoyed it thoroughly. Possibly if he had heard his uncle relating the story of his meeting that morning with the Italian woman, it might have interfered with his digestion, but the Gregorys all listened to it with interest.

"Perhaps that queer sort of madman who comes round here sometimes with an organ is her husband," said Sibyl.

"What, the man with the splendid voice! Oh, no, he is an Italian, I feel sure—looks as if he had a stiletto hidden about him somewhere or other. Didn't you say her husband was an Englishman, Holder?"

"Yes, or at least not an Italian."

The talk went off to other things. They were a gay, lively party—no passing instinct warned the Gregorys of the much-loved Cousin Kenneth's troubles. Dr. Holder had not the faintest suspicion that the fate of his own nephew was bound up with the woman who had so excited his interest.

Yet at that very moment a meeting was taking place that would affect both one and the other of the young men in a greater and less degree.

Lisa, the Italian woman, had gone to one or two of the places Dr. Holder had told her of, and found no difficulty in making a friend of the second woman to whom she applied for a night's lodging. She was a widow, an old servant of the vicar's, and had neither chick nor child. She made her living as a charwoman, and also by letting three of the rooms in her small cottage. Strange to say, her husband had been a Frenchman, and she had picked up enough of his language to get on a little.

She and Lisa soon managed to understand one another, and the heart of the childless widow went out instantly to the three pretty quaint-looking children. She had no other lodger just then, she said, except a queer old man with an organ—also an Italian—who was just then going round that part of the world with his instrument. He had been there before, she told Lisa, and though she could not help thinking he was rather touched in the head, yet he was quiet and respectable, and she evidently rather liked him.

Lisa listened with interest and asked questions, but the two confused one another rather, and fell back upon the children at last.

The rest of the afternoon and early evening was taken up with feeding, them, putting them all three to bed—then the two women sat down to talk and eat their own supper; but they had scarcely begun, when there came a knock at the door.

"It is Giuseppe," said the hostess, and true enough it was the man. He came in, his organ on his back; but the moment he entered the room he flung it down, and raised himself to his full height, throwing up his arms and glancing round wildly. It was evident that something had excited him strangely.

As he caught sight of Lisa he uttered a wild sort of cry, then sank cowering on a chair, covering his face with his hands.

"Ghosts, spirits! Ah, the place is full of them to-night—they are all round," he muttered in his own tongue.

Lisa had sprung to her feet.

"Giuseppe Barotti!" she exclaimed, "it is you, really you!" and she put her hand on his shoulder.

At this proof that she was real flesh and blood, a living woman, not a ghost, the man took his hands from his face, and looked up at her; he was trembling violently.

"It is you, Lisa! you in truth! Why are you here? Do you know that this place is full of spirits? I saw him just now; he was there—in a garden close by the river."

"He! What do you mean, Guiseppe? What have you seen?"

"I saw him—your husband. The man who took you from me—Marco. Il Signor Marco!"

"You saw him, Marco, my husband? Take me to him, directly then!"

She would not be gainsaid, she would listen to no words as to the lateness of the hour, the length of the walk along the river-path, and in a very few minutes she, and the man who had once been her devoted and adoring lover, found themselves on the tow-path—deserted now in the gathering twilight—walking towards the garden where Guiseppe said he had seen the Signor.

Long before they reached Redbourne, however, a figure appeared coming towards them—a man strolling along calmly, a cigar in his mouth.

Little light as there was, some instinct told Lisa that she had found the object of her search even before her companion grasped her arm.

"It is he!—it is Signor Marco—go you and speak to him. I will wait!"

As he spoke he moved aside, and threw himself down on the bank under a hedge.

Lisa walked on with quick decided steps. Markham Pownall had not yet seen her, or, if he had, no instinct had warned him.

He stopped a moment, and stood, turning back to follow the course of a boat that had just gone up, the gay voices of its occupants singing a joyous round as they passed.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his arm, and a voice he believed at that moment to be safely in Paris, said,—

"Marco, my husband, at last I have found you!" and her voice sounded soft.

In his overpowering surprise—not to say horror—he flung her off roughly, so roughly that she very nearly went over the bank; but, with a desperate effort she managed to save herself somehow, and as he drew back she stood facing him, her stately figure drawn up to its full height, her eyes suddenly blazing with excitement.

She had caught the sound of a muttered oath, and realised in that instant that the vague suspicions that had brought her all the way from Paris were not without cause.

"What do you want? Why have you come here?" Markham Pownall asked, as soon as he could recover himself enough to speak.

Then he glanced round—not a soul was in sight—it was a safe spot for an interview at least. The boat, with its singing crew, was disappearing fast. It was so dark he could scarcely see the face of the woman who had claimed him as her husband. Even if anyone had come along the path it would be easy to turn so as to escape recognition.

Lisa hesitated for a moment, then began to speak in a low tone that told little of the passion rising to boiling heat within her.

"I came because I want you, my husband, because I will no longer hear my children called fatherless. The neighbours they all laugh, and say Marco will come to Paris no more—he has a home—many lands—in England—a wife, perhaps. For me, I know that is not true. Did we not get married by an English priest? I have the paper. My name is there, and your name too; I am your wife, but—"

"Are you quite sure of that? I am not!"

Markham Pownall uttered these villainous cold-blooded words in a low voice; but they effectually stopped the unfortunate woman's flow of words that was rising gradually to more passionate utterance.

Strange to say they were true, absolutely true—he was not quite sure if she was his wife or not.

Bad as he was, in many ways inclined to be utterly unscrupulous in using means to an end, he was not wholly a villain—few men are, perhaps.

In those early Paris days, when he had really expected to have to make his way as an artist, he had fallen truly and desperately in love with Lisa, the beautiful Italian model; and when he found that she was not to be had otherwise, he had, as he then thought, married her honestly.

It was only in later days, when Lisa's beauty had palled on him, and he found the children irksome, that he had one day listened to the

chance suggestion of a friend—a worse man than himself—that it would not be difficult to get rid of both incumbrances by discovering that there had been some irregularity in the marriage, rendering it invalid.

In talking it over idly with the friend more than once, it seemed likely that it might be so. Markham's Mephistopheles was a lawyer, and knew something about such matters; but he had disappeared after a time—killed, it was thought, in some row—and Mr. Pownall had allowed things to drift on as they were till his brother's unexpected death sent him back to England and his new life.

Thus he had left Paris, saying good-bye to Lisa as his wife, and undertaking to send her plenty of money. What untruths he told her Heaven knows. She believed that it was work that called him away, and it was only by degrees that other people roused her suspicions, and sent her with characteristic determination in search of him.

As a fact Mr. Pownall had been well content to let things drift for some time. His wife and children did not trouble him much in France. At times even he thought of bringing her over—accepting his marriage as valid.

She was a handsome, clever woman, he thought, and would soon learn to speak English. But by degrees he grew more and more involved in money difficulties—all owing to his gambling propensities. Then he fell desperately in love with Miss Capel—found out the extent of her fortune; and even as he had walked along the river bank that evening, the doubts as to the legality of his marriage had again occupied his thoughts; and he had been thinking a run over to Paris might be a good way of spending some of the time before he could find another chance of prosecuting his suit.

Undoubtedly he must make sure first. Lisa was not the sort of woman to ignore, but somehow he fancied it would not be very difficult to make terms with her. Whenever he had seen her of late he had fancied her love for him was not by any means so great as it had been.

But, after all, it was she who had come to him—sought him out and found him. That passing glimpse at Paddington had been no delusion!

Mr. Pownall was not a particularly brave man morally, but he could bully.

For a moment or two Lisa stood like a statue—even dark as it was, he could see how white her face turned, catch the gleam in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" at last she asked in a low, hissing whisper.

"I mean that I am not quite sure it was all done right. You are Italian—I am English. There might have been some mistake."

"There was not—who said there was?"

"Do you remember that man—de Belleville he called himself—he came one day when you were in one of your pleasant little rages. He said he would rather have a devil for a wife any day. It was he who asked me how we managed to get married. I told him. Then he said, 'My friend, I doubt if Madam Marco has any right to the name she goes by. Most likely you are not married to her at all.'"

"It is a lie!"

"Way be so, but as you have chosen to come all this way without my consent, you can go back to Paris and prove it for yourself. For me, I shall let things go. I was coming to see you shortly, but now—"

Mr. Pownall finished with a triumphant sneer.

"I shall merely go somewhere where it will be absolutely impossible for you to find me, and—you must understand this clearly—not one penny more money will I send you. The children will have to starve."

Whether he meant all he said might be doubted, but he was furious. He was giving full vent to the rage that grew in him moment by moment.

Get rid of her somehow, he must. Let her remain one day in Maidenhead, her story would be all over the place; his uncle would hear it, and he knew well what he would think on the subject.

(Continued on page 284.)

A BRAVE HEART.

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CHAPTER VII.

BASIL FOTHERGILL let another twenty-four hours elapse before he approached Justina again, either in his own person or in the person of his sister.

Although he could give no definite reason for it, he was conscious of a sensation of strong uneasiness about the girl during these hours of holding himself aloof. It was only natural that his thoughts should be sombre ones; thoughts sadder and heavier than any that had yet thronged in his mind.

The blighted young life, the close, horrible association with one so utterly vicious and dishonourable as Rupert Seaton had proved himself to be, the whole of Justina's disastrous surroundings, the realization of her most terrible mistake, were, in themselves thoughts potent and keen enough to fill the heart of all or anyone who cared for her, with a sorrow and regret hardly describable in words.

But it was a feeling apart and above these that oppressed Basil all through the long day and night that followed on that early morning visit to his hotel and the drive afterwards to Bayswater.

He was not a man given to weakness of emotions or pre-occupations, or any such thing, yet it was absolutely impossible for him to dissociate from his mind the feeling that Justina was passing through a further, and perhaps even a harsher trouble than that which had just burdened her.

If he had allowed himself to yield to the impulse in his heart, he would have started without any delay for that humble lodging that was the nearest approach to a home the girl could claim, but strong, as this desire was, Basil conquered it.

He was possessed of the most supreme delicacy and refinement of feeling. Though he was in a material sense the wronged and injured person in this last transaction of Rupert Seaton's, and though by his generosity and friendship all difficulties and dangers had been removed from the forger's path, still he shrank from intruding himself upon the sacred agony of Justina's grief too soon; he determined he would wait some sign from her before going to see her, or risking a chance of meeting the man who had robbed him and dishonoured her.

When the next day came, however, and there was not a word or a sign from Justina, his impulse to go to her to give her help, comfort, protection perhaps, was so strong to be put on one side.

He was so grave and sombre at breakfast-time, that his sister looked at him anxiously.

"Must you still remain in town, Bay?" she asked, gently, calling him by her own pet name for the big, tender-hearted brother whom she loved so devotedly; "isn't that tiresome lawyer's business done yet? You know you are looking not at all well. London never agrees with you. You want the sunshine and fresh air of Croome to set you up. Can't you arrange to come down with me to-day, darling?"

Sir Basil looked up hurriedly and yet most affectionately at his sister. She was a slight, small likeness of himself; not pretty exactly, but so frank in expression, so fair and fresh and neat, that she seemed to possess a beauty that was distinct but difficult to define exactly.

"Do you want to go home so very much, Molly?" he asked.

Miss Fothergill nodded her head.

"The place will be at sixes and sevens without me," she declared, munching her toast briskly in her white even teeth. "You know I only came up for one day, or at the outside two, Bay dear. I am not prepared for a long stay. I have absolutely no clothes with me!"

"What is it you want? Can't you buy a bonnet and shawl somewhere to go on with?"

Molly laughed brightly at this suggestion, given by Sir Basil in a thoughtful abstracted sort of fashion.

"A bonnet—and a shawl! Good heavens! is

it conceivable that a man should suggest such a thing in this age of civilization and general enlightenment? Just imagine me in a shawl, Bay! Why, I should look like a scarecrow of the highest quality;" and then Molly Fothergill dropped her light tone and looked at her brother earnestly.

"Of course I am only exaggerating about my clothes, I have plenty with me, and I will stay just as long as you like if I am not in the way, dear," she said gently.

"You are never in the way, Molly; and just now you can be particularly useful to me. I have something for you to do, in fact, this very day."

"I am delighted to do anything, Bay dear;" and Molly's face expressed her contentment as well as her words. "By the way, did you not want me to go and call on Mrs. Seaton? I can do that this afternoon."

"It is precisely this I am going to ask you to do, Molly," Sir Basil broke in, rather hurriedly; "and I want you to be very kind to Justina. Put on your sweetest, most gracious little self, and let her feel she has found a friend in my sister as well as in myself."

Molly rose from the breakfast table and paused a moment.

"Does she want friends then so very badly, Bay?"

He answered her quietly, and with convincing sadness,—

"She is alone in the world, and she needs a woman's sympathy and love more than I could even tell you in plain words, my little sister. Thank Heaven, such grief and sorrow as have come into that poor child's heart will never enter into your life, Molly; but you will not need the bitter lesson of experience, I know, to let your woman's heart speak out some comfort to her now in her hour of need and trouble."

Tears rose in Molly's clear brown eyes.

"My heart has spoken already, Bay," she made answer, in a low voice. "Even were she an utter stranger to me, I could not withhold my pity after what you have just said; but you know I cannot quite call Mrs. Seaton a stranger. I have such a vivid remembrance of her in those old days when you were studying under her father's care. Why, I almost believe, Bay dear," the generous kind-hearted girl said, laughing slightly, "I almost believe I used to be jealous of little Justina North in those old days. Your letters used to be so full of her, and when you came home for your holidays you could talk of no one else. You had a perfect boyish infatuation for her!"

Sir Basil's face had flushed a little during this speech.

"It was natural I should care for Justina," he answered her rather hurriedly. "She was only a baby when I went to North's, and the loveliest little creature in the world. You cannot conceive, Molly, how her father adored her. It was more than ordinary love, it was worship; and when I recall those days and realize her sad condition now, I can hardly keep the tears from my eyes for thinking what suffering it would be to poor Richard North if he could only know how his beloved child is placed, and the weight of sorrow and care there is laid on her young shoulders."

Molly put out her hand impulsively towards her brother.

"Oh, Bay!" she said with a little catch in her voice, "is there nothing we can do? You don't tell me what her trouble is, but surely we can help her a little. Do you think if I tried to persuade her I should succeed in getting her to come down and stay with us at Croome. I should like to show her some kindness, and perhaps a visit to the country might do her some good?"

Sir Basil drew his sister close to him and kissed her tenderly.

"You have hit the very nail on the head, Molly," he said in a quiet low voice. "Though we may not be able to do very much for Justina, we can yet give her sympathy and consolation, and I believe if you ask her very prettily she will consent to come to us for a few weeks at least. She can do her writing at Croome just as well as in London, and she will have the advantage of the fresh air, to say nothing of all the care and com-

fort my clever little housekeeping sister can give her. It will be a change, I imagine," Basil Fothergill added, with a touch of intense bitterness, "for Justina to feel herself cared for; she has done nothing but fight for herself since her father's death."

Then rising from the table, Sir Basil stood by the fire and gave his sister a short sketch of Justina's circumstances, dwelling as briefly as he could upon Rupert Seaton's unsatisfactoriness, and avoiding all possible mention of the last most terrible grief that had fallen upon this girl who was so dear to him.

"And do you mean to say Mr. Seaton does no work, Bay, and that that poor little thing writes like a slave to keep them both?"

Molly's voice was one tone of amazement and incredulous indignation.

Sir Basil nodded his head for a reply:

"Oh! I call it shameful—disgraceful—horrible. How unmanly! What a horrid, horrid creature he must be. Oh! I do hope, Bay dear, I shall not meet him when I go this afternoon. I am afraid I shall not be able to be civil to him. I do hate unmanly men!" Miss Fothergill declared frankly, "and a man who does no work is as shame to his sex."

Sir Basil smiled faintly as he laid his hand affectionately on the girl's shoulder.

"All the same, Molly, though in the abstract I agree with every fiery word you say, I don't want you to let your indignation find voice before Justina. The child has a pride that makes her hard life even more bitter and difficult to bear, and—"

"Oh, you can trust me. I will be as careful as possible, and I shall hope, before very long, Bay, that this poor, pretty young Justina will call me her friend as well as you."

Then the brother and sister parted, and Miss Fothergill spent a busy morning among the smart West-end shops that, despite her adoration for her beloved country, always possessed a great fascination for her.

There were a good many things to be bought for Molly's various protégés in the village that stretched about her brother's spacious estate, and then there were so many dainty novelties to tempt her artistic eyes—some things that were absolutely necessary for Basil's particular sanctum, besides a dozen little trifles for her own pet corner; a new silver-mounted collar for Juan, the spaniel; some large, photograph frames in which to place the pictures of her friends; and after she had snatched a hurried luncheon Molly filled her hands full of flowers and started off for Bayswater, not without a little thrill of something like excitement mingling with the interest and pleasure this visit afforded her.

As she drew up at the small house another carriage gave way for her cab, and a glance at this small, neat brougham gave Molly all at once a sensation of its belonging to a medical man. Her theory was proved correct almost immediately, for, as she went forward to the door, it opened, and a man came forth from the house.

Molly spoke on the impulse of the moment.

"I have come to see Mrs. Seaton. I hope she is well," she said, glancing at the woman who held the door open; but her query was really addressed to the gentleman who was unmistakably a doctor.

In another moment she heard all there was to hear. Justina was lying very seriously ill, and though it was early to point to the exact nature of her illness, the doctor seemed to regard it as a grave matter, being attended by high fever and excessive suffering in the head.

"And Mr. Seaton just gone to America, too, and she all alone," the landlady said, in that tone of cheerfulness that is peculiar with all the lower classes when brought in contact with trouble and the mysteries of a illness and death.

Molly Fothergill answered this sentence quickly. In an instant her decision was made, and her duty clear:

"No; she is not alone. I am come to see her, and I shall remain here while she is so ill. My name is Fothergill," she added, turning to the doctor, "and Mrs. Seaton is a very dear friend to my brother and myself."

The doctor seemed to find a certain relief in Molly's words.

They walked down the path together, and he gave her a few instructions, and spoke more openly on the illness than he had just done.

"I was feeling very sorry for her, poor child, for she seems little more than that, when you came, Miss Fothergill. She requires great care and close nursing for the next few days. It is the inflammation to the brain I fear. She seems to be in a high state of nervous agitation and excitement. It seems very unfortunate that Mr. Seaton should have had to leave her at this moment. I would have telegraphed for him last night, but the landlady could give me no exact information as to his movements, and Mrs. Seaton is in no condition to be questioned. Your presence relieves me of much anxiety, for I feel now that my patient will be in good hands, and that in consequence the illness may go much better than I feared this morning. Doctors, after all, can do very little in these cases in comparison to what a nurse can do. You will, I think, require professional aid, and I can send you a very nice woman the moment you find this necessary."

"I should like her to come at once," Molly answered, gravely. "I am not frightened of any amount of nursing, only I am quite inexperienced, and so I should like a proper nurse—and oh I would you be so very kind as to send a telegram to my brother, telling him the facts of the case and that I am going to stay here."

Molly gave him Sir Basil's address and the doctor promised to communicate with him at once. After this he drove briskly away, and Miss Fothergill returned to the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOLLY FOTHERGILL established herself as guardian of the sick girl, and mistress of the entire situation, in so quiet and yet so determined a manner that Justina's landlady found herself accepting the new comer and her commands in the most ordinary way, as though Miss Fothergill had been in the habit of paying frequent visits to this little Bayswater lodging-house, instead of never having set foot in it before this day that was the commencement of Justina's illness.

Before nightfall Molly had arranged everything to the best of her power; the nurse recommended by the doctor had come, the small rooms were set in the order most convenient for the furtherance of the nursing Molly determined should be as much her work as the nurse's.

Basil had answered the telegram immediately; he had held a short whispered conference with his sister in the little sitting-room where Justina had set toiling at her pen for so many weary hours. Molly was so deeply concerned in the motive that brought them both here, that her brother's mental condition was not clearly demonstrated to her; she saw, of course, that he was very grave, and wore the hard, taciturn sort of manner which, with Basil, was always a sure sign that he was troubled and anxious, but Molly Fothergill did not see beyond this manner, and she was absolutely ignorant of the havoc this last sad event was creating in her brother's great, generous heart.

She was a little startled, it is true, for one moment when, having repeated all that the nurse and the doctor had to say upon the case, she suggested in the most natural way that Basil should either go or send word to Justina's relations of the trouble that had fallen upon her, and Basil negatived this suggestion instantly.

"They have left her to starve and die as soon as she could—we will not let them do anything for her now. She belongs to us, Molly, for this little time at least, and we will share her with no one."

The man's voice had been full of an emotion that was almost impossible for his sister to understand; she attributed it, and rightly enough in a certain sense, to anger against the people who had turned their back on the child of his old tutor, and to the indignation which was

as strong within him as it could be towards the man who had most evidently deserted his girl-wife, and been no doubt the primary cause of her bodily collapse. Farther than this Molly did not go at this moment.

She was delighted that Basil made no objections to all she had done and desired to do (she little knew what a comfort it was to her brother to realise that she was with Justina Seaton in this dark hour), and together they discussed and arranged things in the easiest and most natural way.

At his sister's instigation Sir Basil had a little conversation with the landlady; and after that loquacious lady had given him all the information in her power, he went away from the house for awhile, feeling convinced, as he went, that Rupert Seaton had undoubtedly abandoned the girl he had married, and gone out of her life perhaps forever.

It must be forgiven Basil if, in this first moment of grief and anxiety over Justina's condition, he should have set his teeth, and, while in his heart he had a fierce anger that was not to be measured in words against the coward and the thief whose name Justina bore, had prayed earnestly and eagerly that this might be realised, and that the young creature, who was so inexpressibly dear to him, should be henceforth free from the contaminating influence, the evilness, the burden and grief of her husband's presence.

The heart of the man thrilled with the only sensation of pleasure possible under the circumstances of the moment, when he let himself realise how completely the child had drifted into his protecting care. He had no selfish thoughts, no selfish desires, hopes or regrets; he thought only of Justina, and of the joy it was to him to be able to minister, even ever so little, to the girl he knew now he loved with all the tenacity and strength of his vigorous, tender, faithful nature.

The lengthened absence of Sir Basil Fothergill and his sister from their country home was the subject of some discussion and more regret among their neighbours, friends and tenantry; they were both established as firm favourites in the hearts of those among whom they lived, and there was a depressed and almost desolate feeling prevalent when the master of the big house and his bright, charming, happy-looking sister were absent from it.

Little rumours, of course, leaked out as to the cause of this prolonged stay in London. Miss Fothergill had written explanations to her house-keeper, and it was pretty quickly known that the illness of some very near and dear friend was the reason that kept both Sir Basil and Molly in town.

The younger portion of the small world that was clustered together around and about Croome Park were not disposed to regard this sick friend with any degree of sympathy or liking, since he or she (the sex of the invalid was not yet known) had most successfully spoiled the beginning of the hunting season and autumnal amusements. Ever since Basil had come into the title and settled down in his estate, matters had been decidedly more pleasant in a social sense for the young folk in Croomehurst village and the surrounding country.

There was always some sort of entertainment provided at Croome. Molly Fothergill had a girl's love for fun and brightness, and the moment she found herself in a position to encourage these propensities, she did so with a zest and a delight that was infectious. She had a wonderful sympathy and comprehension for all young people; and as Basil gave her carte blanche to do just as she liked, she soon established herself as a leader of all sorts and kinds of amusements, associating with her a group of two or three girls from the families scattered about, who were only too eager to help her in her scheme for making the general life more entertaining and agreeable than life is ordinarily speaking in a small country place.

There were hunt-breakfasts, and shooting luncheons, five o'clock tea was an institution at Croome, and at least twice a week there was an informal dinner-party which, as often as not developed into an impromptu dance.

This particular moment, in fact, when Miss Fothergill was detained in London apparently an indefinite time through the illness of her friend, was the one when, according to former arrangements, the ball of Croomehurst amusements and gaieties was started rolling briskly and delightfully, and it can therefore be imagined that the absence of the Croome master and mistress was not only regretted but absolutely deplored, while their return was watched for as eagerly as a prisoner waits for his release.

At last, when November was almost a thing of the past, the news spread about that Sir Basil was not only expected to be coming to Croome shortly, but that he had already arrived, and that Miss Fothergill was to follow him almost immediately.

There was a flutter of excitement mingled with relief at this news, and the appearance of the master of Croome riding through the village on his big bay mare speedily set at rest any doubts that might have been cast on the truth of the rumour.

Quite unknown to himself, though Molly was perfectly conscious of it, and took a sly delight in realising it, Basil Fothergill was something of a hero in the eyes of the female part of Croomehurst community; indeed, his magnificent figure, and honest, attractive face, possessed a charm for women in all lands and places, and here, where everything took its position by comparisons, Basil Fothergill stood apart and above all the other men, even including the handsome young Earl of Duncheater, who lived for a few months in the year at a ramshackle old house about a mile out of Croomehurst.

Basil's universal tenderness and courtesy made his seeming imperviousness to all sentiment the more marked. He was gracious to all, and singled out no one person more than another for his attentions.

When he had first come among them, there had been a flutter of excitement and hope in every mother's heart near and far; but the time had gone on, and Basil Fothergill was as far from choosing a wife as he had been in the beginning.

There were all sorts of theories given for his strange indifference to women; but Molly alone, out of all the world knew the value of these theories.

Basil was indifferent simply because, as yet, no woman had ever appealed to his heart. He could love fast enough when the right moment and the right person arrived, and Molly, although she was so happy as "châtelaine" of his house, told herself truthfully and unselfishly that she would rejoice sincerely when that moment did come.

"Basil ought to marry—he would be the best husband in the world; yes, the very best," Molly had often said to herself. Then sometimes she had sat and pondered over the girls and young women who clustered about their home, and who would, any one of them, have jumped at the chance of being Lady Fothergill, and reigning in her place up at the big house.

They were for the most part bright, pretty fresh-faced girls, athletic to a fault, perhaps, good at taking their hedges, or at playing golf, or at walking their dozen miles. There were a few superior to the rest in point of accomplishments; but on the whole, though they were nice, pleasant, happy girls, they were none of them amazingly clever or intellectual, none of them just exactly the sort of woman Molly would like to see as her brother's wife.

"Except, perhaps, Leam," Molly would add to herself when she arrived as far as this. "There is no doubt Leam Greatorex is neither a common nor an unintellectual woman. If anything, she is just a little too clever—at least she is too clever for me; but I can't help admiring her. She is a splendid-looking creature, and she would be an ornament to any man's house. I believe, too, Leam cares sincerely for Basil. I wonder if he ever gives a second thought to her."

This had been a query that had come more than once into Molly Fothergill's mind in the days before that visit to London. She never let such a query come now, for the answer to this or to any such a one was given to her only too surely, too sadly.

Basil might marry a dozen times over, but love in its truest, intensest form would never enter into any marriage he might make, for it was given in all its splendour of tenderness of passionate yearning, to the poor fragile creature who had been brought back from the jaws of death, as it were, by a miracle.

Molly had soon learnt to love Justina Seaton. She would have done so willingly to please Basil, if even it had not been so easy a task; but from the first moment she entered into Justina's shadowed life and took up the work her womanly sympathy and goodness allotted to her Molly Fothergill was conscious of a new sensation; a rush of new affection; a clinging love for this brave young thing who had fought and would have to fight against as hard a lot as can fall to most humans.

It was impossible for the sister within her not to feel regret that was keen as sorrow over the secret she had read in Basil's heart and eyes; but it was equally impossible for her to let wisdom, or sisterly love, or any other feeling stand between herself and Justina.

The girl's loveliness of mind as well as body; her desolation; the fact of her cruel fate; the sweetness of her nature; all combined to draw her closer and closer to the heart of the girl who nursed her through her terrible illness with a tenderness and a devotion passing words. And when the convalescence began, it was Molly who planned first and afterwards insisted on carrying away her invalid to the comforts and the fresh clear air of their country home.

Basil was despatched down first, and Justina and Molly were to follow him in a day or two.

Justina had tried to make some protest—to urge the necessity to return to her work and take up her checked career, but Molly put every protest vigorously on one side.

"You shall do what you like when you are well—but until you are well you will do as I like, Justina, so please let me hear no more on the matter. After you have been a little while at Croome, you will feel another person, and if it is work you are troubling about, well, you can set your mind at rest. I will have an attic prepared for you, and when I consider you are sufficiently strong to do so, you shall go up there and scribble to your heart's content—more than that I shall not promise."

Justina had smiled faintly, but there were big tears in her eyes, and when she was alone she let them flow freely.

The tenderness, the care, the love she had received was something to great for her almost to realise.

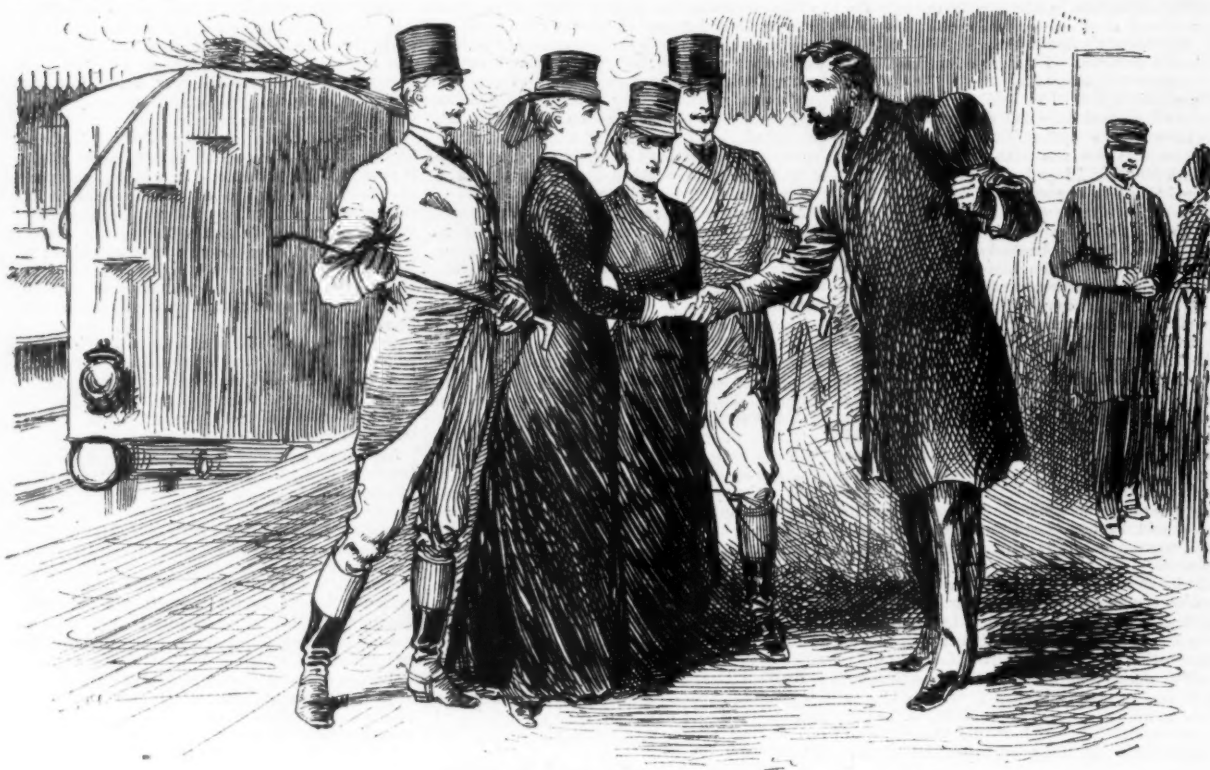
She was so unused to any consideration, so accustomed to fight for herself, this new state of things simply destroyed her strength of will, even sapped her courage. And then when she remembered the horrible wrong her husband had done to the man who had proved himself more than a friend, more than human in his generous forbearance and goodness, Justina's proud heart seemed to be struck by some keen, sharp sword, so great was the pain, so overpowering the anguish of realising her husband's dishonour and cowardly sin.

When she found how earnestly both Sir Basil and Molly desired her to be with them at Croome, Justina determined to go for a time at least. There was no way possible for her to show her deep gratitude, her illimitable recognition of their great goodness, save by sacrificing her own will to theirs.

If she could have obeyed the dictates of her pride only, she would not have agreed to go on this visit; not because her own dependence upon them was hurtful to her, but because she suffered when she let herself remember the wrong, the shameful theft, of which Rupert Seaton had been guilty.

She would go for a little while till she was grown stronger and more fit to start out in the old hard groove of labour and trial. Her soul was set now on working for one end—to pay back to Basil Fothergill the sum of money which her husband had obtained through forgery.

Once she was only half as strong as she used to be, she would begin at this tremendous task, and



SIR BASIL SHOOK HANDS WITH THEM ALL!

pride and honour would be the staffs to support her on the road she had to travel.

She left her lodgings with no regrets—indeed, she was glad to be away from a place where she had been so deeply tried—and she set forth for the journey to Croome, finding a pleasure in watching Molly's delight and excitement grow greater and greater as her home was approached.

"Now I know how much you have done for me," she said once in her soft, low voice to Molly.

Miss Fothergill leaned forward in the carriage and put her hand on the speaker's lips.

"I do love Croome but I love you much better, and I would do everything over and over again, if it came in my way. I am a silly person, aren't I, Justina? But I never can grow out of excitement, and I am so happy at the thought of bringing you back to our dear old home, I feel half out of my mind. I mean you to get enormously strong and fat too—don't laugh, if you please, Justina, I said fat, and, as I happen to know what Croomehurst air can do when it is reused, I know what I am talking about!"

At the station a carriage was waiting, and Sir Basil was waiting on the platform. He had been there quite a quarter of an hour before it was necessary, and as he stood leaning against the wooden railings a train had come in from another direction, and among the passengers who alighted from it were two young ladies and a couple of men.

The girls were in riding-habits, and from their well-splashed condition had evidently been riding across some very heavy country, their attendant squires being in an equally muddy condition.

Sir Basil shook hands with them all.

"I am come to meet my sister, she arrives to-day," he explained, and then he turned to the tallest young woman. She was not particularly handsome, having a rather thin, sallow face, but her eyes were magnificent, and her carriage exceedingly good.

"I am sorry to hear your mother is not very well, Miss Greatorex," he said gently.

"Oh! there is not much the matter really," Leam Greatorex answered. "You know mother is very neuralgic, and this damp weather does not suit her exactly. When are you going to pay her a visit, Sir Basil? She would be so glad to see you any time!"

"I will go very soon, perhaps to-morrow. Are you going to walk home? Won't you all be very tired?"

"Oh! it will take off the stiffness," cried the other girl, by name Beatrice Somerset, a fresh, smiling young creature. "Come along, Leam; we must be starting. Sir Basil, give my love to Molly, and say how enchanted I am she is home. We shall begin to live again now, shan't we Leam?"

Leam Greatorex's answer was a glance out of her splendid eyes up at Sir Basil; but he did not see it, he was looking almost eagerly down the line; the signal was given, and a puff of smoke in the distance denoted the coming of the train.

The four young people bade him *au revoir* and went away. The walk homeward was accomplished by Miss Greatorex, at least, in utter silence.

She was thinking of the man they had just left, and she was wondering with a thrill at her heart if she should ever grow into that nearer and closer intercourse with him which she had desired for so long a time.

There had been no definite hope or ambition formed in Leam's mind about Basil Fothergill up to this day, but somehow this afternoon, how or why she could not have told, she was conscious of an eagerness, a longing or yearning to break asunder the coldness of this man's indifference to herself, and to touch upon the heart the wealth of love and passion that she knew was hidden beneath this indifference.

"Leam, you are very unsocial," Beatrice Somerset cried after awhile. "You have not spoken a single word since we left the station!"

"I have been listening to you, Bee; you forget you never give another person a chance to speak!"

"How impertinent!" Miss Somerset touched her friend lightly with her whip, then she looked backwards. "Here comes the Fothergill carriage; let us stand and give Molly a salute as she passes!"

The girl drew up at the side of the road as she spoke, and her companions humoured her, Leam standing a little apart, a tall and superb figure in her well-cut habit.

The carriage rolled by, Molly all smiles and laughing words and gesticulations.

"Can't stop now because of my invalid, it is too damp; shall see you both to-morrow!" she cried, as she blew each girl a dozen kisses.

"Oh! Leam," Beatrice Somerset exclaimed. "Did you see Molly's new friend; what an exquisitely lovely girl!"

"By jove, she's right!" one of the men said under his breath.

Leam made no answer, she had grown a shade paler. Justina's beauty had not been lost on her, nor had the flush of eagerness on Basil Fothergill's face escaped her. She had the sensation of being hurt most keenly; it was almost an insult to her to note that change in this man's looks. His universal indifference had given her a satisfaction to realize. She had felt that the day she should win him would be a day of triumph indeed; but to-day a sudden difference had come upon her upon him, upon the whole world. She did not know exactly what her thoughts were, only she was conscious all at once of a strong hot wave of jealous dislike for the pale lovely girl who had come to be an inmate of Croome Hall.

(To be continued.)

"INK suitable for love-letters," is advertised by a Parisian stationer. It is made of a solution of iodide of starch, and characters written with it entirely fade in four weeks.



"I HAVE COME TO GIVE YOU MY ANSWER!" SAID LORD CHATTERLEY TO THE TERRIFIED MAN BEFORE HIM.

A TERRIBLE PROMISE.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Cecil Monkton—otherwise Mr. March—left Northshire he had by no means settled on any plan of action. All his sympathy and pity had been aroused by the beautiful girl who had come over to England with but one thought, to solve the mystery of her sister's fate, but he was terribly troubled because he felt everything pointed to his brother-in-law as Nora's murderer; and little cause as he had to like Lord Chatterley, for Gertrude's sake he dreaded the Earl's crime being discovered and punished.

From his sister's confidences in the picture gallery, Cecil felt positive the humble village organist was in reality the Honorable Beatrice Thorne, rightful heiress of Chatterley Castle and its broad acres. That her uncle would try to remove her from his path seemed certain.

Cecil had advised Miss Charles to "wait," but he himself felt action of some kind was absolutely necessary. He would have confided everything to Kenneth Ford, only Chatterley, being his near relative, his friend would have felt the disgrace intolerably. He dared not trust such a terrible revelation to a lawyer. There seemed but one thing for it, to go to the Earl in his own true character of Cecil Monkton, and insist on his recognising his niece or proving her an impostor.

"He has never seen me as 'Mr. March,'" reflected Cecil. "I know Gertrude is desperately afraid of my identity being discovered, but I believe in the end it will be better for her. Yes, I will follow Chatterley to Paris and tell him I have discovered his guilty secret."

It was evening when he reached the French capital. He called at the hotel where Lord Chatterley was staying, but heard he had gone out. The next morning he was more fortunate. The waiter admitted the English milord was within, but doubted if he would see a stranger. A liberal *douceur* having overcome his hesitation,

Cecil Monkton was ushered into the Earl's presence for the first time since his sister's wedding day.

Reginald Chatterley had a private sitting-room rather high up in the hotel, and far removed from the public reception-rooms. He was sitting by the table busily reading, but he looked up at the entrance of a stranger.

"I can see no one," he said haughtily to the waiter in French. "I told you I was engaged."

The man mentioned some excuse, and Cecil advancing to his brother-in-law, said sternly—

"You must see me, Chatterley!"

Not by change of muscle, not by a single sound did the Earl betray surprise or recognition; his voice was courteous if a little bored, as he said coldly,—

"You are making a mistake, sir. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"I am your wife's brother, Cecil Monkton."

"Lady Chatterley's brother has been dead for years. I grant, now you mention it, I see a slight resemblance to him, but I am not to be deceived by a cunning imposture!"

"Look here," said Monkton, sternly, "this won't do. I am your brother-in-law. You know perfectly well you invented the story of my death to silence Gertrude's anxiety about my fate. I can bring a dozen witnesses to prove that I am Cecil Monkton!"

"I deny it," replied Chatterley; "but if you are my wife's brother ever so, I refuse to have anything to do with you. I married Gertrude, not her family. I may be a rich man, but I can't afford to keep her poor relations!"

Monkton bore the taunt unmoved.

"I am rich enough to need nothing from you," he said quietly. "I have sought you out on a matter which nearly concerns your honour, and I insist upon your hearing me. If you refuse, I shall take my story to the French police. A girl born in Paris, and living there for eighteen years, would surely be sufficiently a French subject for the authorities here to prosecute her murderer?"

Chatterley glared at him savagely.

"You talk like a madman."

"But there is a method in my madness. You may be the Earl of Chatterley, but both the estates and fortune belonging to that title are the property of your orphan niece, your brother Thorne's daughter, whose only sister, Nora, you murdered on the eleventh of last September, by means of poisoned sweetmeats."

The shaft had gone home. Lord Chatterley staggered to a seat; for a moment he was too amazed to speak, in another his denial was ready. But it came too late; Cecil had seen the abject terror on his face, and knew he was in the presence of a guilty man.

"You must be mad or drunk to dare to say such a thing," cried the Earl, fiercely. "I will have you taken up for defamation of character, Sir."

"Softly," said Cecil, slowly, "before you do that you had better think over the story. You travelled from London by the same train as that poor child; you were seen speaking to her—the landlady of the lodgings at Bloomsbury, where you stayed as Kenneth Ford, is ready to swear the white hair and beard, quoted in all the newspapers in the description of the poor girl's fellow traveller, were assumed; things will look pretty black against you."

Lord Chatterley muttered something like a curse.

"You can prove nothing," he said, sullenly, "and why you should seek to, I can't think. If you are my wife's brother, one would fancy, for her sake, you would not bring such an unfounded charge against her husband."

"It is for Gertrude's sake I have come to you first," said Cecil Monkton, fiercely. "I believe you murdered your niece Nora, and that her sister Beatrice, who is already on the track, will soon discover your guilt and give you up to justice; for my sister's sake and her child's, I would gladly save you from the gallows."

"Very kind, I'm sure," said Lord Chatterley, bitterly; "but if I had committed murder,

you would not be able to save me from the penalty."

"I think I could," said Cecil, slowly. "If you resigned her father's property to Beatrice of your own free will, no one would believe you killed her sister three months ago for the sake of it."

"I did not kill the girl," cried Lord Chatterley, brokenly. "Isn't it enough that I am haunted by her face night and day, that I am tortured by the sight of her blue eyes? but you must try to ruin me. It was suicide, I tell you, suicide. I did not put the sweets into her mouth, she ate them of her own free will."

Monkton looked at the miserable man with something like contempt.

"You confess, then, that you are the person of whom we have heard so much, the white-haired, white-bearded man, who was the girl's fellow-traveller?"

"And if I do? If you go straight from here and denounce me to the police, who do you think would suffer? Not me; you need not imagine I am fool enough not to keep the means of escape always ready. I will tell you what would happen. I should get off scot-free—you can't punish the dead—and the shadow of my crime would rest for all time upon my wife and child; on them, on them alone, my punishment would fall."

It was perfectly true; Monkton could not deny it. Lord Chatterley went on,—

"My wife is not devoted to me, but she is simply wrapped up in her child. I ask you if you expect an affectionate welcome from your sister (granting for the moment you are Cecil Monkton) after you have changed Phillis's lot from that of a spoiled heiress to the penniless, disgraced child of a murderer."

Cecil shuddered. How cleverly Chatterley reasoned! what intense cunning he displayed!

"I repeat, I want to save you from justice; I want to spare my sister the disgrace of your guilt being discovered."

"And to make me penniless?"

"No," Monkton answered, after a moment's thought. "I am a rich man. Resign your estate and fortune to your brother's daughter. Give up your ill-gotten gains, and I will not only do my utmost to help you to hide your guilty secret, but I will transfer to you half my wealth, or, in plain words, about six thousand a year."

"It is a generous offer," said Chatterley, thoughtfully.

Monkton thought he was relenting, and pursued his advantage.

"Only listen to me, and I will do more for you than that. I will not only keep your secret from all the world, but I will go away from Chatterley without revealing to the world at large I am Gertrude's brother. I will give you a solemn promise never to cross your path again to remind you one man knows your terrible past."

"Do you know you want me to undo the work of eighteen years? For that time I have plotted for Chatterley, aye! and sinned for it. I tell you plainly, had my boy lived I would never have given it up, but as it is—"

"Phillis cannot carry on the old name," pleaded Cecil. "She will be happier far with a moderate fortune than as a great heiress. Chatterley, for my sister's sake do your best to undo the wrong. You can't bring that poor girl back to life in her youth and beauty; but you can repent, and give up all you have so unjustly stolen."

"Give me time to think," pleaded Chatterley, eagerly. "It is the ruin of my worldly hopes you ask for. Give me time to think."

"I will give you till to-night."

"Where are you staying?"

Cecil gave the address of his hotel, in a quieter part of Paris than the one where the Earl was staying.

"I gave my name as March," he said, gravely. "If you and I come to terms, Chatterley, I shall never return to the name of Monkton."

"I will come there at six," said the Earl, quietly. "I can't tell you what my decision will be, but I swear you shall have my answer at six. In any case I return to England by to-night's mail train, but I promise you to bring you my answer first."

Cecil Monkton went straight back to his hotel, and ordering a private sitting-room, stretched himself in an easy chair by the fire.

He was not a strong man, and the excitement of the interview with his brother-in-law after the fatigue of the long journey from Northshire had tired him terribly.

Then his conscience was as sensitive as a woman's, and the dread haunted him that in helping Chatterley to escape punishment, he was guilty of sharing his crime.

"I had to promise to give up all hope of intercourse with Gertrude," he thought, sadly. "It will be beginning life again, for, of course, I can't keep up my friendship with Kenneth Ford. I shall be sworn to silence now, and I couldn't face his questioning. Well, perhaps it is for the best if I am not to stay in Chatterley. I couldn't meet her again. I should feel ashamed to look into her beautiful eyes, and know that instead of helping her I had betrayed her. If Chatterley accepts my terms, you will be a great heiress, Beatrice, and many men will want you for their wife. You will be a person most likely, and never know that a poor returned wanderer gave you the one love of his life!"

It was even so. Cecil Monkton had had such a wild roving life during the years men generally think of love and marriage that his heart had never beat quicker for any woman. At thirty-five he seemed to most people a grave middle-aged bachelor; but the affection, which had never been frittered away in idle flirtation, had been lying dormant in his breast all those years only to break into a flame passionate love for beautiful Beatrice Charles.

It was love at first sight. When he met her that afternoon on the moor, and drove her home the work was done. He knew when he had left her at Elm Cottage his fate had come to him; for all time he should love her, and her alone.

Even her confession the next day that she had thought he was the man she sought; could not change his love; for with the sting came the antidote, the assurance the moment she heard his voice she felt he could not have harmed her sister.

Yes, Cecil loved Beatrice with all the passion of love when it comes first to a man in his riper years. He was rich enough to have wooed even an heiress, without fear of being thought mercenary; and yet of his own act and deed he set up a barrier between himself and his desire. If he had gone to Beatrice with his story of Chatterley's guilt, if he had said to her "There is the man who killed your sister, and for eighteen years has stolen your home and fortune," gratitude would have turned her heart towards him, and his own deep love would have done the rest. But his happiness would have been bought at the price of his sister's misery; nor could Cecil have purchased love, joy and prosperity by overwhelming Gertrude with disgrace, making her the widow of a murderer, and branding little Phillis for all time as a convict's child.

It was not that he loved Beatrice less, but that he loved honour more. With painful clearness he realized now that his sister had sacrificed her whole future for him: to provide him with funds to try his fortune at the gold-fields, she had ten years before sold herself to a man she did not love; for her brother's sake, she had become Lord Chatterley's wife. How could Cecil repay her generosity by founding his own happiness on her husband's shame?

"It can't be," decided the returned colonist. "Beatrice herself would despise me if I could come to her through such a sea of cruel ingratitude. No, for all time I must lose her, the one woman I could have worshipped is denied me; but at least I will keep my honour, not even to win Beatrice can I utterly blight poor Gertrude's life."

He lunched at the public table, then he told the waiter he was expecting a gentleman to call on business, and gave orders he should be shown up to his private room. The afternoon dragged painfully with Cecil; it was a relief when the attendant brought in candles and disturbed for a moment his sad reverie.

"No one has asked for Monsieur," the maid observed respectfully.

"No; I do not expect my friend before six. Bring him up here, and see that we are not disturbed."

The waiter went back to the lower part of the hotel.

As he reached the principal entrance he met an old gentleman dressed as a minister. His face was mild and benevolent; his silvery hair and beard inspired the *garçon's* respect, and his fluent French was another claim to it.

"Mr. March," the waiter replied, "but certainly he was now upstairs. Could it be that this was the visitor he expected?"

"Yes; I promised to come," replied the old gentleman. "We have not met for years, and shall have much to talk about. Kindly show me to his room. I will announce myself."

The waiter led the way up three flights of stairs and indicated a door at the end of a long passage.

The minister smiled, and thanked him with old-fashioned warmth.

It occurred to Adolph that if all English heretic preachers were like this one they must be a charming race.

The old gentleman walked slowly—the result of age or infirmity—and as the waiter was out of sight and hearing when he reached the door of the sitting-room engaged by Mr. March.

It was half-past five.

Cecil Monkton had poked the fire into a brighter blaze, and wished he could give wings to the lagging hand of time, so that the fateful interview might be advanced, when the door opened noisily, and a nameless instinct told him he was no longer alone.

Was he dreaming? Had he brooded so long over the Salton tragedy that his brain conjured up fancy pictures of the man supposed to have been its chief actor?

He caught his breath in vague alarm.

There before him stood the venerable, patriarchal figure described to offer in the local papers and mentioned by Beatrice herself only three days before as that of her dreaded foe.

Cecil Monkton was no coward.

He had faced wild beasts often on his foreign travels. He had stood his ground boldly in dangers of nearly every kind; but at the sight of this strange visitant the blood seemed to freeze in his veins.

He strove to speak and demand the intruder's business, but his trembling lips would not obey him.

His limbs seemed paralyzed. He simply could not move towards the bell which hung at the farther end of the room.

He sat perfectly still, his eyes, as it were, fascinated by the new-comer's earnest gaze.

"I have come to give you my answer," said his strange visitant, and the voice was Lord Chatterley's. "Here it is. I defy you to do your worst, for when I leave this room you will be powerless—see!"

The glitter of shining steel passed before Cecil's eyes.

A terrible piercing pain seized his side.

He knew that he had been stabbed. He tried to move. He uttered one cry too feeble to penetrate beyond the room. Then his head fell back. His eyes closed.

Lord Chatterley's face was full of a mocking triumph.

His work was done.

He waited one minute to see if his victim regained consciousness, but Monkton might have been already cold in death from his rigid immovability.

Lord Chatterley did not waste his time. He pulled off the white beard and wig which had so disguised him. He doffed the thick clerical greatcoat, the Methodist collar and muslin bands, the preacher's broad-brimmed hat.

Only one thing troubled him. He could hardly walk downstairs, bareheaded. Seeing Cecil's soft travelling cap on the table, he seized the question by putting it on. He carefully looked the door on his victim, put the key in his pocket, and walked downstairs.

Fortune favoured him; it was just the hour of the table-d'hôte, so few people were about. With wonderful calm and self-possession he spoke to

the porter in the hall, asking him some careless question which hardly needed an answer, then he went out into the street, and not till he was several hundred yards from the hotel did he show any appearance of haste; then he hailed a *fiacre*, and bade the man drive for his life to the *Garde du nord*. When his carriage stopped, the porter from the fashionable hotel, where Lord Chatterley had been staying, was waiting with his Gladstone bag.

What was there to connect this noble, prosperous traveller with the tragedy, presently to be discovered in the Rue Cherbourg?

CHAPTER XXII.

Kenneth Ford turned to Dr. Bardon, gravely. "There is only one person in the place who can nurse Beatrice—my mother."

The old doctor started. "We cannot ask Lady Edith to undertake such a charge, at her time of life nursing is a fatiguing business. Why should she trouble about a stranger?"

"I can answer for her as for myself," said Kenneth, kindly, "and she has taken a very great fancy to poor Miss Charles; she says the young lady reminds her of my sister."

"There is a likeness," admitted the doctor. "Well, Mr. Ford, if your mother will help us, it may be just the saving of that poor child's life."

A sudden inspiration struck Kenneth.

"Can she possibly be moved?"

"Why? She is quiet enough at the Cottage; it would alarm her terribly for me to insist on her removal."

"I suppose you mean to tell her what you have discovered?"

"Eventually, not yet."

"I suppose then it won't do? But I think she would be safer at the Lane House."

The doctor considered.

"We'd better not risk it, it would only set people talking; if only Lady Edith will help us, the poor child will be safe enough at the Cottage."

Kenneth never knew how he told his mother. He knew she was a woman—despite her sweet, gentle ways—of nerve and courage, and he never attempted to hide the truth from her. In a very few words he begged her to undertake the care of Miss Charles, saying Dr. Bardon alleged an attempt had been made to poison her.

"The self-same poison that killed that poor girl in the train last September."

Lady Edith shuddered.

"Then, Kenneth, the man who killed her must be in our midst."

"Mother—before Monkton went away—he begged me to take care of Miss Charles; he declared some special danger threatened her, because she was the sister of that poor child."

Lady Edith sent for her maid and told her she was going to the Cottage to nurse the young organism. Mary Pratt first declared her mistress would be ill herself, and then, with the freedom of an old and faithful servant, announced her intention of accompanying her.

"I'm used to illness, my lady, anything I can do I'm willing. It's not catching you see, so I can come backwards and forwards. She was a pretty young creature was Miss Charles, and I should like to do my best for her."

When Dr. Bardon paid his afternoon visit, he found that Beatrice was conscious, and Lady Edith was installed as head nurse.

"Am I dying?" asked the girl, feebly. "Oh, doctor, I don't want to die. I haven't kept my promise."

The mind was half wandering still, she plainly saw. He took her hand gently and answered her with fatherly kindness.

"No, my dear young lady, you are not dying; but you have had a marvellous escape. I will tell you all about it when you are stronger. Meanwhile you have nothing to do but keep quiet and obey your kind friend here."

"But my work—Lady Phillis's lessons?"

"Everything must wait. In three or four

days you will probably be quite well, but you must rest now."

Downstairs he cross-examined Mrs. Kemp as to what Miss Charles had eaten and drunk the day before. The worthy widow, who had no suspicion of the attempt at poisoning Beatrice, regarded his question as so many reflections on her own skill at cooking, and was honestly indignant.

"I did my best, doctor, and Miss Charles seemed to like her food. Anyway she made no complaints. Yesterday, too, it was very little I had to do with her meals. She had lunch at the Castle, and tea with the Vicar's wife. When she came home after the evening service, she didn't eat a mite of supper; she told me she was that sleepy she could hardly keep her eyes open."

"Then she had no meals at home after breakfast?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"My good woman," said the doctor, testily, "do speak plainly. Either Miss Charles had food here or she had not."

"She had nothing of my preparing. After the Castle carriage took her to church in the afternoon, it left a basket of grapes for her here, and she ate them when she came in. There weren't so many, and I think French folks eat more fruit than we do. There might have been a pound or more. She seemed to enjoy them too."

"That couldn't hurt her," said Dr. Bardon, thoughtfully. "Well, we must do our best to get her well, Mrs. Kemp."

Lady Edith was called down from the sick-room very soon after the doctor left, to interview no less a person than the Earl of Chatterley.

It was only Monday, not forty-eight hours since he had wounded Cecil Monkton and left him for dead in a foreign land, but Reginald bore no trace of remorse. No one, looking at the Earl, could have guessed the dark deeds that ought to have weighed on his soul. His manner was full of sympathy for the sick girl. He explained to his aunt he had called on his way to the station—where he was going to meet his guests—on purpose to inquire for her.

Lady Edith was amazed and touched at his consideration, she felt almost angry with Kenneth, who came in soon after his cousin, for the short, grumpy way in which he spoke to the Earl.

She was careful to obey the doctor's orders. She dropped not a hint of poison. She said Miss Charles had certainly been very ill, but they hoped she would pull through.

"We heard she was dying," said Lord Chatterley, gravely. "It amazed us for she was perfectly well yesterday, when she lunched with us."

"She is much better already. I feel almost certain she will do well."

"And has she all she wants? Is there anything we can send her? Gertrude made me bring a few grapes in case she was well enough to fancy them."

"How is your wife?" asked Kenneth, of his cousin, rather pointedly. "I have not seen her since her return from Paris."

"Gertrude is very well. I must be going. You will remember, aunt Edith, to send to us for anything your patient may require."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed Chatterley had so much feeling," said Lady Edith, when he had departed. "Kenneth, my dear boy, what are you about?" for her son was calmly wrapping up the grapes his cousin had brought, as though he meant to take them away and leave only the empty basket for Miss Charles.

"I'll get Bardon to look at them," said Mr. Ford, curiously. "I—I don't fancy them. They're not Chatterley's growing. They've no viney, and he's such a taste for bargains. He may have been imposed upon."

"Kenneth!"

There was anguish and reproach too in her voice. She was far too sharp-sighted to be put off with his excuse. She knew, as well as though he had told her, of what her son suspected her nephew.

"Kenneth!"

"Mother, darling," and his voice faltered, "I never meant you to know."

"Kenneth, you ought not to think such things. Reginald is not a good man, perhaps, but it is wickedly unjust to suspect him of attempting murder."

"Mother, listen to me. Beatrice Charles resembles my sister. Look at her well, and you will notice something else. Her eyes and hair are the same as my grandmother's. Do you think it possible that a stranger should resemble both your mother and your child?"

"Kenneth!"

"I was but a lad when my cousin Thorne died; but I seem to remember that he had lived abroad for two or three years; that there was a fancy he had fallen into some attachment in Paris which might have ended in his bringing home a French wife."

"And you think—"

"I believe that child upstairs is his daughter—and the heiress of Chatterley. I would stake a great deal that Reginald knows it."

"You should have told me before."

"I couldn't. Odd fancies have floated through my brain, but the whole complete story only dawned on me as I sat here and listened to him—the consummate scoundrel! Before Cecil Monkton went away he told me Miss Charles was sister to the murdered girl in Chatterley Churchyard, and he begged me solemnly to guard her from Reginald; I thought him mad then. I think I understand his warning now."

Kenneth had wrapped up the grapes carefully as he spoke, and now he turned to say "Good-bye," as he was obliged to go home in time to write letters for the evening post.

"Ken," said his mother, gravely, "Cecil Monkton ought to be here. For poor Gertrude's sake he must reveal his identity. These awful suspicions cannot be concealed much longer; and she may feel it a comfort to know she has her brother near."

"Mother, that's another mystery. Cecil started for London last Wednesday, and promised to send his address at once to his housekeeper at the Chase. She has heard nothing whatever from him since."

Lady Edith trembled. It seemed to her that troubles were thickening around her, but, gentle and womanly as she was, she had a very keen intelligence and a ready wit. She hit on one thought which had never occurred to her before.

"Kenneth, send for Paul Verity. We ought to have a lawyer's opinion."

"But I hardly know him," persisted Kenneth. "He is Cartwright's friend, but I haven't met him half-a-dozen times."

"He was Cecil Monkton's lawyer and an old friend of Gertrude's family. Tell him that my client—Mr. March—was really her long-lost brother, and he will be interested in the case."

"I will write to-night."

"Telegraph," said his mother, slowly. "Kenneth, I am getting an old woman, I can't see things as clearly as I used; but it seems to me that Cecil has met with foul play."

"Your sister is well; but I urgently require your professional advice, if possible come to Salton at once."

That was the message which Kenneth Ford sent off from the chief office at Wilmington, waiting in the little town until the answer came, as he did not care for it to pass through the hands of the woman who kept the Salton post-office.

Even in that moment he felt thankful he had remembered Mr. Verity's private address, as it was far too late for a telegram to have found the lawyer at his office.

The answer was short but to the purpose.

"Shall reach Salton 6.45 AM Tuesday."

Punctually to the moment the train came steaming in. Kenneth Ford was waiting on the platform, and as the two men shook hands a stranger would have thought it was he who had been travelling all night, so worn and haggard did he look.

"Do you know," said Paul, gravely, "if I had not had your summons I should have been at Salton to-day. I am very anxious about a client of mine—Mr. March."

"He is my staunch friend," said Kenneth. "I would not lightly betray his confidence, but

things have come to such a pass I must trust you with his secret. March is only an assumed name, he is really Cecil Monkton, Lady Chatterley's only brother!"

Paul drew a long breath of surprise.

"Then that explains everything. His trusting his affairs to me, his intense desire to get a house in Northshire, and the fact that, though I could not recall his name, his face and voice were perfectly familiar to me—"

"When did you see him last?"

"On Wednesday morning. He called on me at Streatham. He told me he was starting on an expedition of some danger, and that if he did not write to me or come to the office within a week he wished me to go down to Copsleigh, pay up everything, and return the keys etcetera to Mr. Hurst."

Kenneth looked at the lawyer eagerly. Paul Verity could see by his white, drawn face, which looked to haggard by the light of the carriage lamps, how near his heart was his friend's fate.

"You have heard from him?"

"I have heard nothing; but I believe a cruel attempt has been made to murder him. There was a paragraph in the evening papers last night which exactly applied to my client. I was in two minds to start for Paris, only I thought I had better come here first and see if any clue was to be found to his private history. I should have started by the ten o'clock express this morning even if I had not had your telegram."

In the pleasant dining-room at the Lane House a bright fire burnt and breakfast was ready. The lamps were lighted, and the lowered blinds shut out all sight of the cold, cruel grey dawn. Paul Verity denied that he was in the least tired—a bath, and he should be fit for anything; but first he pointed out to Kenneth a paragraph in the *Evening Standard* headed, "Dastardly attempt to murder an Englishman in Paris by a pretended clergyman."

The account was short but to the purpose. A full description of Cecil was given, and it was expressly stated that he had given the name of March on arriving at the hotel, and the address London.

He had spoken of expecting a visitor, and desired their interview should be undisturbed. The waiter described the "venerable minister" and his perfect French.

The victim was not discovered until three hours after the assault, when he was removed to the hospital, where he remained in a critical condition at the time of the telegram being sent off.

Kenneth Ford shuddered. Of course the disguised minister was Lord Chatterley. Equally, of course, he poured out the whole story to Paul Verity, from the suspicions born in his brain as he listened to Cecil Monkton's warning, to the attempt at poisoning Miss Charles the previous Sunday. The lawyer listened with intense interest.

"It is a terrible position for you," he said, gravely. "To my mind there is no doubt of Lord Chatterley's guilt!"

"And I must be the person to bring it home to him, and cover his wife with ignominy."

"I think either you or I had better start for France at once. We can identify poor Monkton, and ascertain if he had any suspicion of his assailant; if Miss Charles' nurse and doctor are forewarned, no danger can happen here. It seems to me better not to attempt the Earl's punishment until she is out of danger, or poor March is sufficiently recovered to appear against him."

"Perhaps you are right. I would go to France willingly, but that I should leave my mother without anyone to help her. She would have to cope with Lord Chatterley alone."

"His power will soon be defeated," said Paul Verity, gravely. "As soon as ever Miss Charles is able to attend to business matters, an action must be begun to recover her father's estate and fortune."

"And to prosecute Chatterley for her sister's murder," said Kenneth, sadly. "She is not likely to let him go unpunished. It seems her sole object in coming to England was to avenge her sister. She promised their grandmother on

her death-bed never to rest while Nora's fate remained a mystery."

"A terrible promise!" said Paul Verity, solemnly.

"Aye, but I believe she will keep it at any cost."

They little knew, as they discussed Lord Chatterley's crimes, that punishment had already lighted on him—that he had even then been called to answer for his dark deeds before a tribunal higher than that of any earthly judge!

(To be continued.)

FICKLE FORTUNE.

—3:—

CHAPTER XIX.

"MADGE," repeated Mercy, in a shrill, awful whisper, "tell me, have you wilfully deceived me? You have said Miss Forsyth was plain—nay, more, that she was homely—and on all sides of me I hear them speaking of her wonderful beauty."

Madge sank back shivering in her seat.

"It's fine feathers that make fine birds tonight," she rejoined, faintly. "No wonder they think Vera Forsyth looks well to-night. She's rigged out like a real peacock; and her face is painted, too. I can see it clear across the room; and I am quite sure that Mr. Trescott has noticed it; and I've heard him say that if there's anything which he detests, it's girls who whiten their faces with chalk."

Still Mercy did not feel comforted. A nameless fear which she could scarcely define by words had crept into her heart, and a smouldering flame of jealousy burst suddenly forth; and that was the beginning of a terrible end.

She leaned wearily back in her seat, and looked so white that Madge was frightened.

"Shall I get you a glass of ice-water, Miss Mercy?" she cried.

The pale lips murmured assent, and she flew to do her mistress's bidding.

Left to herself, Mercy sprang hastily to her feet.

"It almost seems as if I shall go mad!" she murmured, "yes, mad, with this terrible fear clutching at my heart! I must have air. I am stifling!"

All unmindful of the errand upon which she had sent Madge, Mercy rose hastily to her feet, and, remembering that there was a rear entrance, leading from the ball-room near where she sat, she groped her way thither.

The night air fanned her feverish cheek, but it did not cool the fever in her brain or the fire that seemed eating into her very heart. A thousand fancies, so weird and strange that they terrified her, seemed to take possession of her brain. She had relied so entirely upon what they had told her—that Miss Forsyth was very plain—that the feeling of jealousy had never before occurred to her; for well she knew that Trescott was a beauty-woohipper, and that no matter how much he might be thrown in contact with a girl who was plain of face, he would never dream of being anything else than simply courteous to her.

Now affairs seemed to take on a new and hideous form.

She recalled each and every incident that had taken place since Miss Forsyth's arrival, and

"Trifles light as air
Seemed confirmation strong as Holy Writ."

as she viewed them now.

"Even the guests notice how attentive he is to her," she said to herself, with a bitter sob, wringing her cold little hands and clutching them tightly over her heart.

Suddenly she heard the sound of voices, and sunk down upon a seat at hand until they should pass by.

She did not know that the seat which she had selected on the broad piazza was directly back of one of the large, vine-wreathed, fluted pillars, and in the dense shadow.

This time she readily divined that the voices must belong to two light-hearted, happy girls.

"Are you having a good time, Grace, dear?" asked one.

"Oh, quite the jolliest I have ever had in all my life!" was the reply. "I haven't missed one dance, and all my partners have been so handsome—quite the prettiest fellows in the ball-room! And how is it with you?"

"Oh, I'm enjoying myself, too!" laughed the other girl. "But did you notice what a nippy I had in that last waltz-quadrille? Don't you hate partners who stand away off, and barely touch your finger-tips as they dance with you? Upon my word, I'd rather have the straight-as-a-mackerel kind, who hold you so tight you can scarcely catch your breath!"

And at this both girls went off into uproarious laughter, when suddenly one of them exclaimed:

"Have you yet had a waltz with handsome Leonard Trescott?"

"No," returned the other, ruefully. "At the last ball I went to he was almost wild to put his name down for every waltz with me. But, after all, I can not wonder at that when I see how greatly he is infatuated with the beauty of the ball to-night—the fair Vera Forsyth."

"Have you heard all the talk to-night about that?" chimed in the other, her voice sinking to a low, confidential tone. "Every one has noticed it, and it is the talk of the ball-room."

"It is shameful for him to carry on so," returned her companion, "when every one knows that his wedding-day with poor blind Mercy Wood is so near at hand."

"Do you know," said the other, slowly, "that I doubt if he will ever marry Mercy, now? You must remember that he became engaged to her before that terrible accident. And do you know there is great diversity of opinion as to whether the poor fellow should marry her or not. It is very nice to read about in books—of lovers proving true to their fiancées through every trouble and tribulation—but I tell you they don't do it in real life. When trouble comes to a girl, nine lovers out of ten fly from her to seek pastures new; and, after all, to come right down to the fine point, between you and me, could you really blame Leonard Trescott if he were to break off with Mercy? He is young and handsome, and I say that it would be a bitter shame for him to go through life with a blind girl for a wife; and when I think of it I actually feel indignant with the girl for holding him to his engagement under such circumstances. She ought to know that in time he would actually hate her for it. She can share none of his joys. Why, she would be only a pitiful burden to handsome Leonard Trescott. That girl whom he seems so infatuated with would be a thousand times more suitable for him. Oh, what a handsome couple they do make! And everyone can see, though they think they hide it so well, how desperately they are in love with each other."

They moved on, little dreaming of the ruin and blight they had left behind them.

They were scarcely out of hearing when the great cry that had been choked back so long burst forth in a wild, piercing wail of agony that meant the breaking then and there of a human heart. But the dance-music inside, to which the joyous, merry feet kept time, completely drowned it.

Mercy had risen from her chair, and the look on her face was terrible to behold.

"Let me quite understand it," she whispered—"let me try to realize and grasp the awful truth: Leonard Trescott, my lover, has ceased to care for me, and is lavishing his attention, nay, more, his affection, upon another, and one who in return loves him; and they say that I should give him up to her—I, who love him better than my own life! He is all I have left me in my terrible affliction, and they would take even him from me and give him to another. They said it was not right for me to cling to him, and to burden him with a blind wife through life—that the thought is torture to him, Oh, heaven! can it be true?"

And again the angels of the great White Throne were startled with the piercing cries of

woe that broke from the girl's white lips, which once more the dance-music mercifully drowned.

"I will go to him and confront him with what I have heard. He shall choose between us before all the people assembled here to-night. I will fling myself upon my knees at his feet, crying out: 'Oh, my darling! my love! my life! tell me that the cruel rumours which I have heard are false—that you do not hate me because—because of the awful affliction that Heaven has seen fit to put upon me! Turn from the girl by your side to me—to me, your promised bride! She can never love you as I do. You are my all—my world! If I were to die to-day—ay, within this hour—my soul could not leave this earth while you were here! I would cling to you in life or in death!'"

With a swift motion Mercy turned and re-entered the house, forgetful of her blindness, and to count the steps which she had taken, remembering only that she was undergoing the greatest trial of her life.

Swift as a fluttering swallow she hastened across the broad piazza, but in the confusion of her whirling brain she had mistaken the direction.

One instant more, too quick for a cry, too quick for a moan, she had stepped off the verandah, and fell with a terrible thud down five feet below, and lay stunned and unconscious, on the gravelled walk.

The shock was so sudden, so terrible that surely Heaven was kind in that the fearful pain of the fall was not realized by her.

The moments dragged themselves wearily by as she lay there. Fully half an hour elapsed. No one missed her save Madge, no one thought of looking for her out in the cold and the darkness, which was penetrated only by the dim light of the stars. The dew of night fell silently, pityingly upon the white, upturned face and curling golden hair, which lay tangled among the sharp pebbles. Gradually consciousness dawned upon her brain. The warm blood crept back to the chilled veins and pulsed feebly, but with it came the remembrance of the terrible blow that had fallen upon her.

Mercy staggered to her feet, but as she did so a strange electric shock seemed to pass through her body and balls of fire to whirl before her eyes. But as they cleared away a great cry broke from the girl's lips:

"Oh, Heaven! can it be true? Heaven has restored my sight to me as miraculously as it was taken from me!"

Once again she saw the blue heavens, with its myriads of golden-hearted stars, bending over her; and the great one house, with its lighted windows, and beyond, the tall, dark oak-trees, with their great, widespread, tossing branches; and she fell upon her knees and kissed the very stones at her feet and the green blades of waving grass that she never once thought she would see again, and she raised her white arms to Heaven with such piteous cries of thankfulness that the angels must have heard and wept over.

Yes, Mercy's sight had been restored to her as miraculously as it had been taken from her.

But even in the midst of her great joy the dregs of woe still lingered, as memory brought back to her the terrible ordeal through which she had passed.

With bated breath she turned and crept swiftly back to the house and up to the long windows that opened out on the porch, sobbing bitterly to herself that she would see at last if her lover was true or false to her.

CHAPTER XX.

WITH her heart throbbing with the most intense excitement, Mercy pushed aside the great clusters of crimson creepers and thick green leaves, pressed her white face close against the window pane, and gazed in upon the gorgeous scene.

For an instant the great blaze of light dazzled her weak eyes, and everything seemed to swim before her.

But gradually, little by little, she began to

distinguish objects, and at last her eyes fell upon the face of Trescott.

With a great cry, the girl clutched her hands tightly over her heart. She never thought that she would look upon his face again in this world.

It was his face—the face of her hero, her king, before which all else paled as the moonbeams pale before the glaring light of the rising sun. Then suddenly she saw the face beside him, into which he was gazing, and it was then that the heart in her bosom almost turned to stone.

Never in all her life had she beheld such a vision of loveliness, and she knew in an instant that the proud beauty must be Vera Forsyth.

Slowly Mercy crept round to the other side of the porch, up to the window, that she might have a better view of them, and perhaps she could hear what they were saying.

But as she reached it, to her great disappointment she saw them link arms and stroll out of the ball-room toward the conservatory, and thither she bent her steps, intent upon reaching it before they did.

She had barely screened herself behind a tall *jardinière* of roses and flowering plants, ere, laughing and chatting, the two entered the floral bower.

"The ball is a grand success, Vera," he was saying, gaily. "They all seem to be enjoying themselves immensely. How is it with you?"

"It is a night that will stand out forever in my life," she responded, glancing up at him with those dangerously dark eyes, and a smile on her red lips.

The girl who watched them breathlessly from behind the roses, clutched her hands over her heart.

The sight maddened her. They were so near each other, their heads bent so close; and while she gazed, suddenly Trescott bent still closer and kissed the girl's lips.

Mercy tried to cry aloud, to spring out and confront them. Her brain reeled; the blood, chill as ice, stood still in her veins, and without a cry, or even a moan, she sunk down unconscious in her hiding-place.

"What is that sound?" cried Vera, with a start.

"Only some of the clumsy servants in the corridor without," replied Trescott. "But, Vera, are you trying to avoid me? I have brought you here to tell you something, and you must listen. The time has come when we must understand each other. You know quite as well as I that the life we are leading, Vera, cannot go on like this forever. From the first moment we met the attraction I felt toward you changed the whole current of my life."

Vera hid her face in the bouquet of white hyacinths which she carried.

"It is too late to talk of that now," she murmured. "Your heart went out to another before I met you."

"There is such a thing as affection waning when one discovers that one's heart is not truly mated, Vera," he cried.

She did not answer; and thus emboldened by her silence, he went on, huskily,—

"Let me give you the whole history of my meeting with Mercy Wood from first to last, and you will understand the situation better. You can realise, Vera, that an acquaintance which commences through a flirtation, as it were, can never end in true love. Such an acquaintance is not a lasting one. Come and sit down on this rustic *éclat*, and listen; and as we sit here in the dim, mellow light, you shall judge me, and your decision shall seal my fate."

At the self-same moment in which Trescott was beginning his narrative, there was quite a commotion at the outer gate, which guarded the main entrance of The Firs.

One of the servants, lounging lazily at his post of duty, was suddenly startled out of a doze into which he had fallen by the shadow of a woman flitting hurriedly past him.

"Hold on, there! Hold on, I say! Who are you, and what do you want?"

A figure clad in a long, dark, cloak, hooded and veiled, stopped short with a little exclamation, which he could not quite catch.

"Hold on, there! Where are you going?"

he repeated, springing to her side. "There is something going on here to-night. You can't enter these grounds until I know who you are and what your business is."

"This is the Firs, is it not?" exclaimed a tremulous voice from behind the veil.

"I should have supposed you would have found that out before you entered the grounds," declared the man, suspiciously.

She saw her mistake, and started.

"I only wanted to make sure that I was right," she said, apologetically. "I—I have business with the housekeeper. I want to see her."

Before she could utter another word he whistled sharply. His call brought a small lad to his side.

"Tell Mrs. Frost there's a young woman here who would like to see her. What name, please?" he asked, abruptly turning to the veiled figure.

"I—I am afraid she wouldn't know; but you might mention the name—Miss Mead," this rather stammering.

Very soon the answer came back that the housekeeper did not know Miss Mead, and hadn't time to see strangers.

"But I must see her!" implored the excited voice from behind the thick veil. "Do let me go to the house to her. I will detain her but a moment, I assure you. She would be so sorry if she missed seeing me."

With no suspicion of the terrible catastrophe that was to follow on the heels of it, the man without further ado allowed her to pass.

The stranger sped quickly up the gravelled walk, and, as Mercy had done but a short time before, drew cautiously up to the brilliantly-lighted window, threw back her veil, and peered breathlessly in upon the gorgeous scene.

As the light fell athwart her, you and I, dear reader, can easily recognise the marble-white face of Annie Best.

"So!" she muttered, between her clenched teeth, "I have tracked my false, perfidious lover to his home at last. When Leonard Trescott lighted the fire of love in my heart, he little knew that the blaze would in time consume himself. I am not one to be made love to and cast off at will, as he shall soon see."

"From the hour that he eloped with Mercy Wood on that memorable Bank holiday, life lost all its charms for me, and I vowed to Heaven that I would find them, and deal out vengeance to them. They crushed my heart, and now I shall crush theirs. Ah, how I watched for him in the crowded streets, the ferries, and on the elevated roads!"

"I believed sooner or later that I should find him, and I was right. Only a week ago I met him face to face, but he did not know me because of the thick veil I wore. I might have raised my veil and he would never have recognised in the pinched and haggard features the countenance of Annie Best, whose beauty he was wont to praise so lavishly. Ah, the traitor!"

"He turned into a florist's shop, and he never dreamed who the woman was who entered the place and stood so silently beside him while he gave the orders for the great decorations for the grand ball which was to take place at his home in The Firs in Windsor, a fortnight from that date."

"When he quitted the shop I flew out after him; but all in an instant he disappeared from my sight as though the ground had suddenly opened and swallowed him. But I laughed aloud. What cared I then? I knew just where to find him. The place was written indelibly on my brain in letters of fire, The Firs, Windsor."

"Only Heaven knows how I have worked to get a day off and to earn extra money to make this little trip! And now I am here to face him. Is he married to Mercy Wood, I wonder? It would take only that knowledge to make a fiend incarnate of me!"

At that moment one of the servants passing along the porch stopped short at sight of the young woman in black, with the death-white face and flashing black eyes, peering into the ball-room from the long porch window.

"They are having a great time in there," he said, jerking his head with a nod in the direction of the ball-room.

"Yes!" returned Annie, sharply.

Then it occurred to her that she could find out something about the lover who had deserted her. And there was another thing which puzzled her greatly. The name which he had given the florist was not the one by which she had known him—she would find out all by this man. Now he was calling himself Mr. Leonard Trescott—that was the name he had given the florist.

"In whose honour is the ball given, my good fellow?" she asked, with an assumption of carelessness.

For a moment he looked stupidly at her.

"I mean, who is giving the ball?" she added.

"Oh, it's Mr. Trescott, ma'am—leastwise, he and Miss Mercy are giving it together."

She started as though a serpent had stung her, then stood perfectly still and looked at the man with gleaming eyes.

"Miss Mercy—who?" she asked, knowing full well what his answer must be.

"Miss Mercy Wood, ma'am," he replied. "But she won't be 'miss' very long, for she is soon to marry Mr. Trescott."

"Soon to marry him!" she repeated, vaguely, saying in her next breath, "then they are not already married," muttering the words more to herself than to the man. "Where does this girl Mercy live?" she asked, suddenly.

"That I couldn't say, ma'am," he replied. "I only came to the Firs to-day, to work. I know only the little that I have heard the servants say while at their work this afternoon. They say Miss Mercy is very beautiful."

CHAPTER XXI.

The white face into which the man gazed grew whiter still, the eyes dilated, and her heart twinged with a pang of jealousy more bitter than death to endure.

People always make that remark when speaking of Meroy. It was that fatal gift which had won her lover from her, Annie said to herself, and which had wrecked her life.

Oh! if she could but destroy that pink-and-white beauty!

The thought was born in Annie Best's breast all in an instant, and seemed to fire her whole being.

She knew her lover's passionate adoration of a beautiful face, and then and there the thought came to her: How long would he love Mercy Wood, if that pretty pink-and-white face was seamed and scarred?

She laughed—a low, strange, eerie laugh that quite startled the man as he walked away.

Left to herself, Annie Best deliberately opened the hall door and stole into the house. She had but one purpose in view, and that was to confront her lover and Mercy before all the invited guests.

There was nothing about the dark figure to attract special attention, and she glided through the corridor unnoticed.

Was it the hand of fate most terrible that guided her toward the conservatory? The dark figure glided like a shadow toward the open door, and then paused abruptly, for the low sound of voices fell upon her ear, and one of them she recognised instantly as that of her perfidious lover.

Through the softened, pearly gloom she saw him sitting on the rustic bench close—very close—to the slender girlish figure in fleecy white, and the sight made the blood in her veins turn to molten fire.

Like an evil spirit she crept toward them. She would—she must—know what he was saying to his companion in that leafy bower.

She said to herself, of course it was Mercy, and that they had stolen away from the lights and the music for a few tender words with each other, after the fashion of love-sick lovers.

It had not been so very long since he had been talking with her in just that lover-like way, only their courtship had taken place in the public parks, sitting on the benches, or walking lovingly arm-in-arm along the crowded thoroughfares; and he had brought Mercy to his own

grand home—Mercy, her hated rival!—to enjoy this paradise of a place, and to make love to her in this Eden bower of roses and scented, murmuring, tinkling fountains.

"Mercy!" he murmured, in his rich, low, musical voice. How plainly she heard the name! The rest of the sentence she could not catch; though she crept nearer and nearer, and strained every nerve to listen. "I love you as I never loved anything in this life before," she heard him say, "and my future without you would be unendurable. I cannot endure it—I will not!"

The poor wretch who listened grew and as he heard the tender words whispered into the ears of another by her false lover.

She crouched still lower, and her hand, as she threw it out wildly, came in contact with something hard and cold. It was a long, thin, sharp-bladed knife which the gardener had been using only that day to trim the bushes, and which, in his hurry, he had carelessly forgotten. She realized instantly what it was, and, with the thought, a diabolical idea crept into her brain.

"Why should Mercy Wood live to enjoy the smiles of the man whose love she has robbed me of," she muttered, below her breath, "while my heart hungers and my soul quivers in endless torture for the affection that is denied me? I can endure it no longer!"

The mad desire to spoil the fair beauty of her rival overpowered her until the thought possessed her and rendered her almost a fiend incarnate.

Grasping the long, sharp-bladed knife tightly, Annie Best raised her right arm slowly, cautiously. Not so much as a leaf rustled to warn the two sitting on the rustic bench of the terrible danger that hung over them.

Trescott's low, musical voice sunk to a hoarse cadence. He drew the slender figure of the girl nearer, and that action was fatal.

There was a quick, whizzing sound, followed by an awful cry of terror from Vera, and Trescott's hand, resting lightly about her waist, was deluged in blood.

"Murder! murder!" Oh, heavens!" shrieked Vera, and she fell at his feet in a swoon.

In the commotion Annie Best turned like a pantheress and made her escape from the conservatory and from the house.

"Murder! murder!" Those terrible cries that rent the air were the first sounds that Mercy heard as her benumbed brain gained consciousness. And as she staggered, dazed, and dazed, to her feet she almost fell over a slimy knife lying there, and at that instant a strong hand flung back the rose-vines and Leonard Trescott, white and quivering with wrath, confronted her.

"Mercy Wood!" he cried, in a horrible voice fairly reverberating with intense emotion, "you! Oh, you cruel, wicked girl! You—you fiend! to do what you have done!" and reaching out his hand he flung her backward from him as though she were a scorpion whose very touch was contamination. "Fly up to your own room," he cried, hoarsely, "and do not leave it for a moment until I come to you there! Have nothing to say; refuse to speak to any one!" and catching her fiercely by the shoulder, he fairly dragged her through the conservatory toward the rear door, which communicated with a back stair-way that led up to her room.

Faint and dazed, Mercy had not offered the least resistance to this cruel treatment. Her brain seemed stupefied by the whirling, confusing events taking place so rapidly around her. She only realized two things: that she had betrayed her presence in the conservatory when she fell to the floor upon hearing her lover speak words of affection to her rival, and that Leonard was bitterly angry with her for being there. She did not remember that she had lost consciousness. It seemed to her that as her senses were about leaving her strange cries recalled them.

It occurred to her that in his excitement and anger her lover had not noticed that she had regained her sight.

Warily Mercy ascended the steep, narrow stair-way and entered her own room. A soft, low, dim light flooded the apartment, upon which she had not gazed for many and many a long day.

"Madge was not there, and she flung herself into the nearest arm-chair, sobbing wretchedly, although on that night she had cause to cry out to Heaven and rejoice for Heaven's mercy to her for so unexpectedly restoring her sight. But, ah, me! how strange it is that all the blessings Heaven can shower upon us seem as drops when the one love we crave proves fickle.

Mercy did not have the heart to cry out joyfully and thankfully. Her head dropped on her breast with a low, quivering sigh, and her hands fell in her lap.

Suddenly something around the bottom of her dress caught her eye, and she started to her feet with a low cry.

"It is blood!" she cried out in an awful voice.

No sooner had the door closed behind Mercy ere Trescott flew back to Vera's side.

No one had heard the terrible cries. He thanked Heaven for that. The music had drowned them.

He had quite believed that Vera was dying. A hasty examination showed him that it was only a slight wound on the shoulder, from which blood was flowing profusely.

"Thank Heaven it is no worse!" he cried, breathing freely.

He quickly set about restoring Vera, and in a moment she opened her eyes.

"Murder! murder!" she would have cried again, but he put his hand instantly over her red lips.

"Hush! hush! in Heaven's name!" he cried. "You will alarm the whole household. You are not seriously hurt."

"Some one was trying to murder me!" shrieked Vera, hysterically.

"No, no!" he returned, quickly. "Listen, Vera, for Heaven's sake! One of the panes of glass of the conservatory directly overhead was broken, and a little part of it fell in, grazing your shoulder. It is a deep and painful scratch, I can well understand; but it is only a scratch, I can assure you."

"Oh, it has ruined my dress!" cried the girl, in anger and dismay, never thinking for an instant of doubting the truth of his assertion. "I cannot appear in the ball-room again. No one must know that we were here together," she went on, hastily—"not one human soul! You must give out that I—I became suddenly indisposed and went to my own room."

"Yes, I think your suggestions are best," he agreed.

The guests received this explanation of the sudden absence of the beauty of the ball with regret, and more than one whisper went the rounds of the room how this seemed to disturb handsome Leonard Trescott, for his face was very pale, and he seemed so nervous.

At the earliest opportunity Leonard Trescott slipped away from the merry throng and up to Mercy's apartment, hastily knocking at the door.

She opened it herself.

"Step out into the corridor," he said, sternly; "I want to speak to you."

And trembling with apprehension caused by his stern manner, Mercy obeyed.

She could see, even in the dim light, that his face was white as death.

"I have come to have an understanding with you, Mercy Wood," he cried, hoarsely. "Your dastardly action of to-night has forever placed a barrier between you and me! I am here to say this to you: here and now I sever our betrothal! The same roof shall no longer shelter us both! Either you leave this house to-night, or I'll go!"

CHAPTER XXII.

It was the most pitiful scene that pen could describe. The beautiful young girl, in her dress of fleecy white, with the faded purple blossoms on her breast entwined among the meshes of her dishevelled golden hair, crouching back among the green leaves, and the white-faced, handsome, angry man clutching her white arm, crying out hoarsely that never again should they both

breathe the same air beneath that roof—that she must leave The Firs within the hour, or he would.

"I did not know that I had done so terribly wrong," moaned the girl, shrinking back from those angry, fiery eyes that glowered down so fiercely into her own.

A laugh that was more horrible than the wildest imprecation could have been broke from his lips.

"You seem to have a remarkably mixed idea of right and wrong," he retorted, sternly, relaxing his hold and standing before her with rigid, folded arms, his anger growing more intense with each passing instant as he looked down into the girl's agonised face.

Had she done so very, very wrong in remaining in the conservatory, and in listening to her betrothed make love to her rival? she wondered vaguely.

Surely, she should have been the one to have cried out in bitter anger, not he.

"Let me tell you how it all came about," she gasped, faintly.

"I—I was in the ball-room with Madge, when it grew so warm that I sent for an ice. She did not return as soon as I had expected her, and—I groped my way out into the garden to await her there. But as I stepped from the porch a wonderful thing happened, Leonard. I—I missed my footing and fell headlong down the steps to the gravelled walk below, and the shock restored my sight. Oh! look at me, Leonard," she exclaimed, with quivering intensity, holding out her white arms toward him. "I can see now. I can see your idolized face, oh, my beloved! I—I came here to tell you this—to tell you the wonderful tidings? I intended to send to the ball-room for you, but before I could put my intention into execution I—I heard steps approaching, and drew back among the screening leaves till they should pass. You came in with Vera Forsyth, and I heard what you said, and my brain whirled I grew dazed. You—you know the rest!"

He was not overwhelmed by the great tidings that she had regained her sight, as she had expected he would be. Instead, he retorted, brusquely,—

"It was a pity that your sight returned to you to enable you to do so dastardly a deed; and I am beginning to have my doubts whether or not you have been duping us all along, and, under that guise, spying upon us—which seems to be your forte. This revelation makes me angrier than ever," he went on, "for it leaves you with no possible hope of pardon for your atrocious conduct, which merits the whole world's scorn and contempt!"

"I see it all!" cried Mercy, springing to her feet and facing him. "You have prearranged this quarrel with me to break our betrothal, that you might wed your new love—Vera Forsyth. But, just for pure spite, I will not release you—never! I will tell the whole world of your duplicity. An engagement is a solemn thing. It takes two to enter into it and two to break it."

The scorn on his handsome face deepened.

"I do not very well see how you can marry a man when he makes up his mind not to have you," he declared. "That is a difficult feat, and I shall have to see it done before I can be convinced that it can be accomplished," he replied, icily, adding: "There are many women in this world who would stand back and watch such a proceeding with the wildest anxiety, I imagine," this sneeringly.

"You shall never marry Vera Forsyth," Mercy panted. "I—I would prevent it at any cost. Once before you forsook me when I needed you most; you left me to die when I fell from the steamer down into the dark water, when we were returning from Staten Island, that never to be forgotten night; so why should I be surprised at your willingness to desert me now?"

He turned on his heel.

"It is now two o'clock in the morning," he said. "My duty requires me to go down to the ball-room and bid the guests adieu as they take their departure, and when that is over I shall leave this house until this difficulty has been settled. The reading of Doctor Prince's will is to take place at noon. I shall be present then, and

after that—well—well, we shall see what will take place."

With these words Trescott quitted the room, and left Mercy standing there with the tears falling like rain down her cheeks—surely the most piteous object in the whole wide world.

When Trescott found himself alone his intense anger against Mercy began to cool a little.

"It is true she attempted to do a horrible deed," he muttered; "but I must not forget that love for me prompted her to it and show her some mercy."

After all the guests had taken their departure, and the house had settled down into the darkness and quiet of the waning night, Trescott packed his room in a greatly perturbed state of mind, thinking the matter over.

He was terribly in love with Vera, he admitted to himself; but he had done wrong, fearfully wrong, in breaking off his engagement with Mercy until after the reading of the will. Vera was beautiful, bewitching—his idea of all that a proud, imperious, wilful sweetheart should be—but Mercy would have what was much better than all this, the golden shekels; and then, too, now that the girl was no longer blind, she would have plenty of admirers; and he could have cursed himself for those hasty words, that no longer should she live under the same roof with himself.

It was daylight when he threw himself down on the bed, faintly worn out; and his head no sooner touched the pillow than he fell into a deep sleep, and it was almost noon ere he opened his eyes again; and then it was a slow measured chime of the clock as it struck the half hour which awakened him.

"Great Heavens! half-past eleven!" he ejaculated, springing from the couch. "I shall barely have time to get down-stairs to be present at the reading of the will. I must make all haste; but first of all I must find out how Vera is, and if her shoulder pains her much."

He rang the bell hastily, and to the servant who answered the summons he gave his verbal message to Miss Forsyth. But in a very short time the man returned, placing a letter in his hand.

Trescott was mystified, for he saw that it was Vera's delicate chirography. He tore open the envelope with a fever of impatience, and as his eye fell upon the delicately written lines his handsome face turned white as marble.

"MY DEAR LEONARD," it commenced, "you will feel greatly surprised at the contents of this letter. I think it best to break into the subject at once, and to tell you the plain truth of just what has happened."

"Shortly after I left you and retired to my own apartments the pain in my shoulder became so intense that, remembering there was a young surgeon among the invited guests, I sent for him at once. I can never tell you just exactly how it came about, but the upshot of the whole matter was that he asked me to marry him."

"I wanted time to consider it; but he said it must be then and there, within the hour, or never. I demurred, but he was resolute."

"I realized that I held my future in my own hands, and that I had to decide upon my own destiny at once."

"He is a millionaire's son, and you are only a poor, struggling physician. Can you wonder that it could terminate only in one way?"

"I accepted him, and by the time that you are reading this we shall be married and far away. So good-bye, Leonard. Try and forget me, if you can."

"VERA."

With a horrible imprecation, Trescott tore the note into a thousand fragments, hurled them upon the floor and ground his heel into them.

"False!" he cried. "I might have known it. It is always these beautiful women who are so heartless. They draw men on with their smiles and their bewitching fascinations, only to throw them over when a more eligible *parti* appears on the scene."

Deeply as he had been smitten with her charms, her action caused an instantaneous revulsion of feeling.

"What care I how fair she be, if she be not fair to me?" he cried out, bitterly, to himself. "What a fool I was, to be duped by her so long. The iron has entered deep into my soul, but she shall see that she cannot quite crush me. I will live to be revenged upon Vera Forsyth if it costs me my life! If Mercy inherits the million, I will marry her before the sun sets to-night. I only wish that I had known the way that affairs were shaping themselves. I—I should not have treated Mercy so harshly."

It seemed as though all in an instant his heart went back to her in the rebound.

He rushed hurriedly down into the dining-room, there to be met by Mrs. Frost, who advanced toward him with a white, startled face.

"Oh, Mr. Trescott," she gasped, breathlessly, "you can never in the world guess what has happened!"

"I rather think I can," retorted the young man, harshly: "your niece, Miss Forsyth, has eloped with the millionaire's son across the way."

"That—that is not what I had reference to," said Mrs. Frost, with a sob. "I—I admit that Vera has eloped, but it was not she whom I meant; it was Mercy."

"What of her?" cried Trescott, sharply, little dreaming the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

For an instant Trescott looked at the housekeeper in amazement.

"What of Mercy?" he repeated, breathlessly.

"She has disappeared, too!" returned the housekeeper, faintly, adding: "She did not go with Vera as you may imagine."

"No?" he echoed, faintly, inquiringly.

"No," she responded; "she went alone. She said to Madge last night, 'if you wake up on the morrow, and do not find me here, do not weep. I shall be where I will be better off. No one will miss me—no one will know or care whether I have gone.' Madge thought them idle words, and paid little heed to them; but this morning, when she awoke and found that Mercy was not in her room, in the greatest of alarm she came to me and told me what had occurred. At that moment I was just smarting under the blow of Vera's elopement, and words fall to describe my feelings at this second and most terrible catastrophe, for I realised how it would affect you, my poor boy."

Trescott had sunk down into the nearest chair, white as death, and trembling like an aspen-leaf.

He could hardly grasp the meaning of her words.

"Mercy gone—Vera fled with another!" His lips twitched convulsively, but he uttered no sound.

"I made diligent search for Vera and Mercy," Mrs. Frost went on, tearfully. "I found my niece had been married at the rectory, and had taken the first train to the city with her newly-made husband; they intend starting on the steamer which leaves London for America to-day. So, of course, there was nothing to be done in Vera's case, so I turned my attention to Mercy. But, as I remarked before, it was useless. I think she must have gone to London, and if she has, trying to find her will be like hunting for a needle in a haystack. I was shocked that she should have left to-day, because she well knew that this was the day on which the will was to be read, and that concerns her so vitally. Ah! here is a lawyer now," and before Trescott could frame a reply the gentleman was ushered into the old-fashioned library.

He greeted both Mrs. Frost and the young man gravely, and they knew by his demeanour that he had heard what had occurred.

His very first words assured them of that fact, and he went on to say that Mercy's disappearance, however, would make no difference in the reading of Doctor Prince's will, which was set for that day and hour.

"As my time is rather limited," he continued, "you will, I trust, pardon me if I proceed to business at once."

He looked sharply from one to the other, and, as they both bowed assent, he opened the satchel

he had brought with him, and proceeded to take out the document which meant so much to Trescott, unfolded it with great precision, and in his high, metallic voice he read it through slowly and impressively.

Trescott had quite imagined that the old doctor would leave him a goodly share of his vast estate—perhaps something like a hundred thousand or so—indeed, he would not have been surprised to have learned that the doctor had left him a quarter of a million dollars.

To his unspeakable horror he found that he had been cut off without a shilling, all had been left to Mercy without reserve or condition, save one, and that condition was a most important one: that she should marry Trescott six months after his decease, or relinquish the fortune bequeathed to her.

"I may as well explain to you my old friend's idea in making this will," said the lawyer, turning to the young man. "He wished Miss Wood to marry you, and thought this the most expedient and effectual way of bringing about the marriage of two young people whose interests he had so deeply at heart. Had he lived long enough to have made a new will, I am sure it would have been entirely different."

But not one word of all this did Leonard Trescott hear. His brain was on fire. He only realized one thing—that he was a beggar on the face of God's earth; and, to make matters worse, he had by his own rash act driven Mercy from beneath that roof, thereby cutting off his own chance of marrying her and being master of The Firs.

He clenched his hand and ground his handsome white teeth together in terrible rage.

There was but one thing to do, and that was to find Mercy ere the fortnight waned, and marry her at once—that is, if he could ever persuade her to forgive him.

He had parted from her in bitter anger, and said words to her that women never forgive when uttered by those whom they love. The worst part of the whole affair was, their quarrel had been over another girl.

He knew well that Vera quite expected that half of old Doctor Prince's money would be left to him.

And now that he was penniless, as it were, he realized that Vera was not a girl who would cling to him in his adversity; and it was maddening that through his own carelessness he had lost both love and a fortune.

"No steps will be taken until the fortnight has elapsed," said the lawyer in his metallic voice; "and at the expiration of that time, if we do not congratulate you, Mr. Trescott, upon your marriage to Miss Mercy, we shall have to make great changes at The Firs. Allow me to wish you both a very good morning."

With these brief words the brisk little lawyer took a hasty departure.

Mrs. Frost and Trescott stood looking at each other long after his departure with faces pale as death.

It was the housekeeper's words that broke the silence.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Trescott," she said. "It is a terrible thing to have one's hopes dashed after that fashion—and when one doesn't deserve it, either. You were always so good and faithful and true to Mercy, sir; even keeping your promise with her through the most terrible affliction that ever could have befallen her—that of blindness. It is dreadful to think that the moment she regained her sight, and, believing herself to be the possessor of a great fortune, that she should show everyone so plainly that she thought you were not good enough for her to marry by actually running away from you, Mr. Trescott."

Every word she so innocently uttered cut him like a sharp sword.

"Not good enough for her!" he echoed, crushing back the imprecation that sprang to his lips. His blood boiled at the construction which she put upon the matter. It was a terrible blow to his pride, yet he dared not utter the truth until he should know whether or not he should be able to find Mercy, and marry her within the allotted fortnight.

Without a word Trescott turned on his heel

and quitted the room, slamming the door after him with a decided bang.

Before the sun set that night he was in London again and searching for Mercy.

It meant a fortune for him. He must find her. He dared not think what failure would mean to him—of the ruin that would stare him in the face.

The idea suggested itself to him that in all probability Mercy would seek out her old companions of the book-binding. He felt that it would be rather daring to go there, where he would meet Annie Best after his so abrupt desertion of her; but his anxiety over Mercy overcame all scruples, and late that afternoon the girls of the Hollingsworth book-binding were astonished at the door being flung suddenly open and seeing the handsome young man whom they had known as the street-car conductor and Annie Best's lover standing on the threshold.

His eyes ran rapidly over the scores of girls at their tables, resting at length upon a fair, pale, thoughtful young girl standing nearest him. He remembered having often seen her with Mercy. He recollected, too, that her name was Isabel Davis. He stepped up to her and raised his hat with that courteous bow that was always so fascinating to young girls.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but, finding myself in your vicinity, I dropped in to look up my old friend. I refer to the young girl with whom I used to see you so much—Mercy Wood."

To his utmost surprise, the young girl burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, sir, you cannot tell how your words affect me!" she sobbed.

"Why?" he asked, surprisedly.

The girl hung her pretty head, and her blue eyes sought the floor in the greatest embarrassment.

"Will you tell me why?" he repeated, earnestly. "It is my right to know, is it not, Miss Isabel?"

"Well, you see sir," she stammered, confusedly, "we have not seen or heard anything from Mercy Wood since Bank Holiday, and everyone hereabouts thought that—that you knew where she was."

He flushed a dark crimson and gave a guilty start.

"I am so glad to know that our suspicions were groundless," she breathed, thankfully; adding: "I am indeed sorry that I cannot tell you where Mercy is; we would all give the world to know, I assure you."

He could not help asking next in a low, husky voice,—

"What of Annie Best? Where is she?"

Again the girl's face clouded.

"She has worked right along here with us up to a week ago," she answered, "and then Annie went away suddenly, without saying so much as good-bye to any of us." She could not help but add: "She has changed so greatly that you would never know her. She is no longer the dark-eyed beauty whom you remember; she looks ten years older. She never smiles now, and there is a horrible look in her eyes—like the cunning gleam one sees in the eyes of the insane; and, oh! sir, let me warn you—you, of all men—for the love of Heaven, do not cross her path! Remember, I—I warn you."

(To be continued.)

WITH the Gauls it was a common practice to contract debts with a stipulation that they should be payable in the next stage of existence. Hence letters are thrown upon the funeral pile, that the deceased might carry to his relatives and friends in paradise information of the wishes and proceedings of those who remained on earth.

THE cheetah, or hunting leopard, three and a half feet high, is in India considered invaluable in the chase. Hooded as hawks were of old, it is taken out to deer hunts. When a deer or other animal is in sight, the hood is removed, and attention is directed to the victim. The cheetah dodges through the jungle, springs upon his quarry, and throttles him to death.

COWSLIP BALL.

—10—

(Continued from page 273.)

The weekly papers would get hold of it; he was well known in the social world. He ground his teeth with rage as this thought came to him.

And Lisa! his wife! the mother of his children! She stood silent, without a word.

"Yes," she said at last—she had scarcely heeded the utterly cruel suggestion at the end of his speech—"I will go; I will see the good priest; he will find some avocat who will help me for the love of justice. Is it not true; in my heart I know it. I am your wife, Heaven will not let you throw me off. Your heart is black inside; they said it was, but I would not believe what they said. He loves me still a little, I felt sure, but now I know you hate me, and I—"

Her voice had risen to tragic intensity. She too would fain have spoken of her own hatred, but she could not. Truth came without power of her own to her lips.

"Marco, I love you still. Speak; say it is a dream, a bad dream only. I love you, my husband."

She came close to him in the darkness. She laid her hands on his arm; her face was close to his.

There was a second's pause while Markham Pownall's good and bad angels wrestled together. Then he flung her off violently once more, and turning, went rapidly back towards Redbourne.

Lisa made no effort to go after him. Half stunned by his sudden movement, she staggered along the path towards Maidenhead for a few steps, then, throwing herself down on the grassy bank, burst into an agony of tears.

Many minutes did she lie there. She never heard Giuseppe, the organ-man, as he rose from where he had been sitting all the time, and bent over her. His face was crimson; his eyes blood-shot; his right hand was fumbling inside the breast of his coat.

Stooping over her, he muttered some words. There was a flash of steel through the darkness, and he was gone. Then, at last, the crushed, miserable woman rose from the ground and gathered her scattered faculties of body and mind together. No memory of the man who had come to the place with her remained to her as she slowly made her way back to her children.

She had room for but one thought—how soonest to get back to Paris and seek the proofs she needed.

Late that night Giuseppe Baretti came back to his temporary home; but he would not stay, and his manner was wilder than ever.

Lisa was asleep at last with her children, his hostess told him, but she would be sorry not to see him again the next morning. She had remembered him at last, and asked where he could be—most likely at the "Three Stars" inn. He went there mostly when he was in the town for an evening.

Seeing his condition, naturally the good woman put it down to the attractions of the "Three Stars," and let him go with his organ again on his back, when she found he was bent on it.

Dr. Holder stayed late that night at his rubber. He let himself in with his key when he reached home. The house was silent. The servants had gone to bed. No one told him of his nephew's return that evening. The French window of the library, left open for Mr. Pownall's benefit, seemed to him only a bit of carelessness on the old servant's part. How could he guess what had happened? No dream warned him of the figure lying prone on the tow-path not far off, with the life-blood slowly oozing in a crimson stream through the fresh spring grass on the bank.

In the early morning Mr. Markham Pownall was found by some labourers, unconscious, breathing hard, still alive, though seeming as though each breath must be his last.

They recognised him and carried him home to

the Vicarage, rousing the Vicar from his peaceful sleep.

Doctors were sent for in all directions. The small village was soon in a state of overpowering excitement.

And, in less than an hour, the news had reached the woman who had risen early, her whole mind bent on getting back to France as soon as possible.

Slowly the wounded man came back to consciousness.

The doctors had examined him thoroughly, and found out the extent of his injuries—only one wound, evidently made by a sharp-pointed instrument of some sort. It was in the back, but had penetrated through to one lung—perhaps both—in a slanting direction.

With great care and careful nursing his life might be saved, but—

Mr. Pownall insisted on being told. Then he asked to be left alone with his uncle. He was told that he must not speak at all, but he would not be gainsaid.

Dr. Holder sat down by the side of the bed and listened with intense astonishment to the few whispered words,—

"I want to see my wife. I saw her last night. She is here—in Maidenhead. She is Italian. Can't speak—"

A sudden light broke on the good Vicar.

He asked a few questions; told his nephew of his yesterday's experience in the railway carriage.

"I will go myself," he said. "She will most likely be at one of the two places I sent her to."

An hour or two later he came back, and Lisa, very pale, but quite calm and composed, followed him upstairs to his nephew's room.

Her husband lay dozing—half unconscious. She went straight to the bedside, and kneeling down, put her lips to his hand as it lay limp and inert on the coverlet. He did not even open his eyes, but a pale shadow of a smile came to his lips as he murmured her name.

CHAPTER V.

"But, my dear boy, it's nonsense! utter nonsense. Do you mean to tell me that anyone can really suspect you—Kenneth Gregory—of having helped a poor miserable woman like that out of the world?"

"Yes, I do mean it. I know there were a lot of questions asked at the inquest, but such an idea never entered my head till yesterday. I chanced to overhear a word or two—one of my men speaking to a visitor of his—that made me understand. To-day, at the club, I felt sure two men—I know them both well enough to speak to—shake hands with—they avoided me, I feel convinced, this morning. Is not that enough, Admiral? If you were in my case now?"

Kenneth spoke in a low broken voice—he looked pale and ill. In the sudden sense of horror that had fallen upon him he had come instinctively to Admiral Orme, his father's old friend, his own godfather.

It was true—what he said—in a sense. There had to be an inquest, of course, on the body of the woman found in the river, and it was proved that some one had certainly tried to strangle her before she fell, or was thrown in; but, of course, nothing more could be found out.

No one came forward to volunteer evidence as to having seen a fight or a struggle, and the only witness that turned up at all was a policeman, who had chanced to see Captain Gregory and the woman sitting together on the bench, and who recognised the Captain as he waited there ready to claim the body and prove his right to see that the miserable woman was decently buried.

Painful as it all was to him, Kenneth was not a man to shirk what he thought to be a duty. He explained his relationship to the dead woman, and as soon as he was allowed she was buried quietly in Norwood Cemetery.

He wrote to his uncle, Sir James, and told him all that was necessary. He shrank instinctively from seeing any of his father's family till the whole affair was over; and, though his uncle

would not be up for several more weeks, he could not bear the thought of going back to Maidenhead, with its memories of his brief dream of happiness, just yet.

But one day he met Maggie, who was in town for a few hours, by chance.

He had not even known before if they were aware of the tragic end of his engagement.

In the glow of happiness consequent on her own engagement, Maggie could not be prevented from expressing a little sympathy, and, the ice once broken it was a relief to talk of Molly a little.

Then Kenneth learned, to his great surprise, the full extent to which Miss Capel was an heiress.

Maggie herself had only heard it lately. With that knowledge, and with what his cousin could tell him of her own acquaintance with Molly's relations and early life it was not so hard to understand why she had so resented the slightest idea as to being married for her money.

He still hoped that some day she might think better of it, and send him the pledge he had asked for. He was even guilty of watching for the postman many a time, like a love-sick girl, but day by day passed, and no sweet-scented ball arrived.

Cowslips must be quite over by this time, he thought, not knowing that up in the north they bloom many days, even weeks, later than in the warmer southern meadows.

Still he could not make up his mind to give up all hope, and remained in his rooms at Kew.

If Molly wrote at all, it would be to Maidenhead, and from there a letter would be sent on at once he knew well. He felt utterly dull and depressed, as though life held no further charm for him—not an uncommon state of mind for a disappointed lover. Day by day he let invitations, for it was the middle of the season, go by him, and it was from this state of mind that he was roused at last by the terrible knowledge that had come to him with such suddenness.

It was gossip of course, mostly gossip evolved out of a sensational paragraph in an evening paper the day of the inquest—a paragraph Kenneth himself had not seen, but still it was true that the coroner had asked questions pointing to a slight suspicion of the drowned woman's son.

There are many people, unfortunately, to whom suspicion is far more easy and natural than confidence; and Kenneth Gregory's evident avoidance of friends, refusal of invitations, were looked upon as in some sort a confirmation of the possibility of his guilt in the matter.

No real friends of his could possibly think so for a moment; but there was no doubt that his name was bandied about very unpleasantly just then in many a conversation; and to a man intensely sensitive as to his good name and honour, the mere knowledge of such talking must be a great and real trial.

Admiral Orme did not answer Kenneth for some seconds.

The young man had sunk into a chair when he first came in to his godfather's comfortable study, and he sat now, both elbows on the arm of the chair, his face buried in his hands. He was physically and mentally tired. The people who thought he might have helped his tipsy mother out of the world because he refused their invitations to dinners and balls, knew nothing of the love outraged and thrown back to him. Admiral Orme did not know it either, for that matter; but he knew Kenneth Gregory well, had known him from his babyhood.

After a minute or two he rose, went across to his visitor, and put his hand tenderly on the bowed head.

"Kenneth! my boy, my dear boy. You must not take this nonsense like that—look at me!"

Kenneth raised his head—tried to do as he was bidden and look into the kind face bent over him, but his eyes were not clear enough, and with something that sounded suspiciously like a sob, he dropped his head again on his hands.

For some moments the tender-hearted old Admiral could not trust his voice to speak again, but at last Kenneth looked up.

"What shall I do? If you were in my case,

Admiral, what would you think best? Shall I retire—leave the service?"

"Good Heavens, no! Give in to a bit of gossip—newspaper rubbish like that. No, indeed, lad, you a brave man with a whole life before you. Never for one moment think of such a thing, Kenneth. Live it down—face this bit of silly scandal honestly, and, trust me, it will not bother you long. There, give me your hand, and promise me you will not think of giving up your profession because a set of silly fools think a man like you can be capable of such a piece of impossible wickedness. What can it matter to you what idiots like that think or don't think? There, you look better now!"

It was true. As Kenneth listened to his old friend's words the light came back to his eyes, the colour to his face. They were just what he had needed with their ring of moral courage.

He grasped the hand the Admiral held out warmly.

"Thank you, sir. I felt sure I was doing the best thing I could in coming to you. It would be cowardly to give in, as you say. My father would have agreed with you, but I am afraid I shall never rise to his height of moral courage. I will promise you that for the present, at any rate, I will remain as I am."

"And for the future, too. It will blow over, Kenneth, trust me. Yes, your father was truly a brave man, but I don't think he would have any need to be ashamed of his son. You were not lacking in courage when you claimed that poor woman as your mother—Kenneth Gregory. I can tell you it gave me a queer feeling when I read of it. I want to know all about how you proved her to be that poor thing. I remember her when your father married her out in Canada. She was a bit flighty, I thought, even then, but so pretty and bright, and so fond of him as she seemed. Here, take a cigar, you'll find that good, and tell me all. You will stay to dinner, of course, and I will give you a glass of good port. It will cheer you up a bit—nothing like a good glass of old port to make one forget troubles."

Whether it was the port or not, Kenneth Gregory really did feel very much better and brighter when he left Admiral Orme's home that night.

And it was just as well he did, for, as the days passed slowly one by one, it became only too painfully evident to him that a very considerable number of people, some few he reckoned as friends even, were just a little bit inclined to fight shy of him. Probably, in their hearts, they really did not believe him to be a murderer; only his mother's death just then, when she had turned up again after she had been believed to be dead for some years, was just a little too opportune.

More than once, as the slow days lengthened into another week, did the young man feel that he must go to Admiral Orme and ask to be released from his promise—the strain was becoming more than he could bear, even one or two of his fellow officers ignored him as much as possible now.

(To be continued.)

THERE is no difference between a sentence of penal servitude "for life" and "for the term of natural life."

How did the ancient Egyptian artists execute the wall paintings in rock-hewn temples and the tombs of kings which penetrate into the very heart of the mountains, and are absolutely lightless? This question has been answered by Villiers Stuart, author of "Nile Gleanings," who in a letter says that he has often picked up broken fragments of little terra-cotta oil lamps used by these patient, laborious workers in their dismal task. They were fed with olive oil, and yielded about the same amount of light as a wax candle. In the tombs of the kings, not only are acres of wall covered with minutely detailed paintings, but the ceilings also. It must, says Mr. Stuart, have been ruinous to the artist's eyes as well as most laborious. But kings and feudal nobles gave the command, and their slaves had to find means to carry out their masters' commands, or woe be to them.

FACETIE.

It takes but one letter to make Mary marry.

A: "WERE you ever at a baby show?" B: "No; but I have heard Niagara."

BERYL: "Do you think the audience noticed that song I sang so badly?" Mabel: "Which?"

FRENCH OFFICER (to raw recruit): "Do me the favour to dismount and look what a gawk you are on horseback."

JOHNNY: "What are these holes in the Gruyère cheese for?" "Oh, my dear, to let the smell out."

TWO SIDES: "Is he really going to marry Miss Passe?" He must be very deep in love." "Yes—or in debt."

BRIDE No 2: "No other woman ever wore this ring, did she, darling?" Widower: "No woman on earth ever had it on."

"It was right here that I accepted you, John. Had you forgotten?" she said. "My dear, there are some things I can neither forget nor forgive."

"This must be a fine stream for trout," said a pedestrian to a man who was fishing. "I think so, too," said the angler, "for I have been fishing here for an hour and can't get one to leave it."

"Don't you find it hard to resist temptation?" "Oh, no, I have an antidote which never fails me." "What is it?" "I always surrender gracefully at the right moment."

It is a test of politeness for a man to listen with interest to things he knows all about, when they are being told by a person who knows nothing about them.

"COULD you lend me an X?" "My boy," replied Charley Cashgo, "ever since my school-days when I studied algebra X has stood with me for an unknown quantity."

It was in the School of Design. Professor: "What you have just drawn there looks more like a cow than a horse." Pupil: "It is a cow, sir."

"WHY didn't you put my luggage in as I told you?" asked an irate passenger, as the train was moving off. "Eh, mon; yer luggage is no sic a fule as yerself. Ye're in the wrong train."

CLARA (after a tiff): "I presume you would like your ring back." George: "Never mind; keep it. No other girl I know could use that ring, unless she wore it on her thumb."

CUNSO: "Well, McBride, is there as much billing and cooing as there was before marriage?" McBride: "The billing has increased largely."

PRISON MISSIONARY: "Don't you think that after you regain your liberty you can do better?" Burglar: "Well, I'll know enough not to have another pal that's so darn deaf he can't hear a policeman till he's right on us."

BRIGHTON: "I wonder why the messenger boys wear their uniform when they are off duty?" "How do you know that young fellow is off duty?" "Good gracious! how stupid you are, he is running."

MONOCLE GADSBY: "I hear you have broken off with Dolly Dainty." Fweddly: "Yes; she cost me too much money in clothes." "How so?" "She was so fastidious that she wouldn't sit on the same pair of trousers twice."

MRS. BINKS: "How will we manage to keep warm with coal so high?" Mr. Binks: "You think of the fact that I can't get you a new bonnet, and I'll think of the outrageous price of coal, and then we'll both boil."

"I AM tired of modern fiction; can't you recommend me a good standard work?" "Have you read *The Last Days of Pompeii*?" "No, I believe not. Can you tell me what he died of?" "An eruption, I believe."

CHOLLY: "Who is that man that went out just as I came in?" Fweddly: "That's a fellow that comes twice a week to dun me for a tailor's bill. Been doing it ever since last March. He's a doosid borh." "Why don't you pay him, and get rid of him?" "Bah Jove! I nevah thought of that."

DOCTOR BUMPS (a phrenologist): "This boy, ma'am; will never die in prison." Mrs. Girdlet: "I'm sure we ought to be very thankful for that." "Yes; the bump of longevity is highly developed. He will live to serve out his time."

"THOSE last cigars I had from you are up to nothing. The lower down you get in the box the worse they are." "You have always some fault to find. Just turn the box over and begin at the bottom, and they will improve as you go along."

"No, Mr. Spooner," said Miss Elder, kindly, but firmly, "I cannot marry you, but I'll be a—." "Thanks, Miss Elder," interrupted the rejected one spitefully; "but I have two grandmothers."

GRANDMA: "What sort of a young man is that beau of yours?" Susie (reflecting): "Well, he's very nice, but a bit odd. For one thing he's a vegetarian." "For Heaven's sake dismiss him! I married a Unitarian and had no end of worry."

VISITOR: "Why do the residents of this town keep so many dogs?" Mr. Suburb: "For protection. They are cheaper than police." Visitor: "But dogs are dangerous to inoffensive persons." Mr. Suburb: "So are police."

"You are a sort of Anarchist, are you not?" "No," answered Alf, "I am a Socialist." "What is the difference?" asked Beat. "Well, the Socialist wants to divide up the property of the world, and the Anarchist wants to slice up the property-holders."

"SOME men are born lucky," sighed the editor. "Our contemporary across the way has just been bitten by a rattlesnake." "Don't call that lucky, do you?" "Why, certainly! Don't you know that the antidote for a rattlesnake bite is a quart of peach brandy."

A LONG WARM: "We might as well consider our engagement as broken, Reginald." "I don't see why! Your father said postponed." "Postponed until you arrived at years of discretion. And in your case, Reggy, dear, you know what that means."

MOTHER (to her old maid-daughter): "Why, Julia, what do you mean by using the family Bible in that way? You are scratching out figures in the family record and inserting others. 'It is a record of my birth, isn't it?'" "Yes, it is." "Well, I'm lowering the record."

FRIEND: "Given up housekeeping and gone to a hotel, eh? How do you like hotel life?" McTiff: "First-rate. Never was so happy in my life." "Indeed! and how does your wife like it?" "First-class." "Where are you staying?" "I'm at the St. Charles, and she's at the St. James."

CHOLLY: "Most of the jokes in these—aw—comic papahs are meah twash. I've a great mind to sit down and write some myself." Bright: "You don't phrase it right, Cholly." C: "Why not?" B: "You should not say, 'I've a great mind to write some,' but, 'If I had a mind, I could write some.' Nothing like being correct."

"Yes, I'm in the lecture business," said the long-haired passenger, "and I'm making money. I've got a scheme, I have, and it works to a charm. Big houses wherever I go." "A scheme?" "Yes, I always advertise that my lectures are especially for women under thirty years of age and men out of debt. You just ought to see the way people come trooping in."

"How do you understand the phrase an 'impressionist picture'?" asked the country cousin of a city cynic as they stood in the art gallery. "Why, an 'impressionist picture' is one that leaves on your mind the impression that it is the picture of a cow, and the impression lingers until you look into the catalogue and read that it is the picture of a water-spaniel."

ONLY MEN: "I notice every now and then," remarked Mrs. Tungley to her husband "in the newspapers a list of 'Last Words of Great Men,' but never of women. I wonder why that is?" "I can tell you, my dear," said Mr. T. without a touch of irony in his voice; "it is because a woman never has the last word; only men do that, you know;" and then Mrs. T. proceeded to knock her husband's statement into infinitesimal particles seriatim.

"JENNY," called out Mrs. Wilson, to her beautiful daughter upstairs, "I've just got the washing ready for you to hang out." Then Miss Jenny put aside the novel she was reading, rolled up the sleeves from her lovely white arms, and going downstairs filled her pretty mouth with clothes-pins, and hung out the clothes just as young McGarrigan went by to his dinner. The engagement will be duly announced in these columns.

WILLIE: "Mamma, I dreamed last night that I had a fight with a grizzly bear as big as a house, and he tore me most all to pieces. Does it mean anything when you dream like that?" His mamma (taking him tenderly but firmly across her knee): "Yes, my son, it does. It means that I know now exactly what became of that plate of cold chicken that was left after supper last night." (Whack! whack! whack!) "That's what it means."

PROMPTER (to loader of supers at dress rehearsal of stirring Roman drama, "Eight against Might"): "Now, are you all right with the cue?" Loader: "I am so, sir. When the man in the sheet (toga) hollars to the gurrul—" Prompter: "The girl!" Loader: "Katy Field!" we get ready, and when he sings out "Rum and crackers"—" Prompter (travelling): "Caitiff, yield!" "Rome and Gracchus, stupid!" Loader: "Jesse, sir. We are to go for the chap in the brass weskiet."

ONCE, when canvassing Hampshire, Lord Palmerston held a meeting at a hotel which was but dimly lighted at each end by two small windows. During the noble lord's speech he was frequently interrupted by cries of "No! no!" proceeding from a little fat man in one of the windows. There were loud calls to bring him forward; but Lord Palmerston promptly said: "Pray, don't interfere with the gentleman. Let him remain in the window. Providence has denied him any intellectual light; it would be hard, indeed, to deprive him of the light of Heaven."

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Sir! What do you mean, sir, by embracing my daughter?" Young Gentleman: "I only had her head on my shoulder. I saw her in the street to-day with a trailing dress on." "Well, sir?" "A trailing dress gathers up all the germs of disease which may happen to be on the pavement." "What of that, sir?" "She has another dress on now, and I presume that she removed the other in the usual way by raising it over the head." "What has that to do with the matter, sir?" "My coat has been laid away in camphor all summer, and I was merely disinfecting her hair."

"MY dear," called out Mrs. Fourthly from the head of the stairway, "what time does the train leave?" Great drops of perspiration broke out on the Rev. Dr. Fourthly's brow. His wife had just gone upstairs to dress. The train was due in two hours, and her customary time was two hours. If he told her "seven o'clock," they would miss the train. The case was desperate. She must not know the exact hour. And yet he could not tell a lie! He was a man of truth! "My dear," he responded, in a loud, calm, commanding voice, "the train will leave precisely at six—ty minutes after six!" he added, in a trembling whisper.

HE WAS THE BIG PARTY HIMSELF.—A story is told of an unusually large man, very tall and far round. Finding himself caught in a little town about twenty-five miles from Pittsburg one night, with no train going to the city, and being very anxious to reach there at eleven o'clock, he wired for an express down the track to stop for him. "We stop for officials only," came the answer. Quick as a flash went the "second telegram." "Will you stop for a large party?" "Yes," was the reply, and the long express slowed up and stopped when it reached the little town, and the gentleman complacently stepped aboard. "Where is the large party?" inquired the conductor, with wide open astonished eyes, as he gazed about the empty depot. "Ain't I large enough?" chuckled the delighted new passenger. The conductor glared and then burst into a hearty laugh as the fitness of the application burst upon him.

SOCIETY.

EMERALDS are growing remarkably scarce.

In Vienna it is stated that Sarah Bernhardt was compelled to appear before the official judges in all the dresses she would wear on the stage.

In some parts of China it is usual to introduce a friend into the house with some such words as these: "This is my friend—if he steals anything, I will be responsible."

The Queen Regent of Spain has conferred the grand collar of the "Order of the Golden Fleece" upon the last lineal descendant of Christopher Columbus.

The Queen of Roumania is a successful lecturer, as learned as eloquent, but she only goes upon the platform in the privacy of her palace, where the young ladies of the best families are her audiences.

Queen Margherita of Italy's wonderful collection of laces, dating back 1,000 years before Christ, and gathered from Egyptian and Etruscan tombs, will be sent to the Chicago Exhibition—the first time that they have ever left Italy. Accompanying this exhibit of laces there will be a collection of the work of Italian women up to date. This exhibit will be one of the most prominent features of the display in the Women's Building.

The whole of Princess Margaret of Prussia's trousseau is being purchased in Germany, and all the things bought for her in London or in Paris are presents. The wedding-dress of the Princess is to be of the richest white satin, with a wide border of myrtle branches in raised silver embroidery. The veil is being manufactured by five hundred Silesian lace-makers at Hirschberg, in Silesia, and it will be exquisitely figured, after a design provided by the Empress Frederick.

The Academy of Science of Bavaria has just nominated as an honorary member a woman, the Princess Theresa of Bavaria. The Princess is the only daughter of the Prince Regent, and was born in 1850. For some time she has been an authoress, and has published, under the name of Théodore de Bayer, many books on travels and on geographical questions; and she is the first woman to whom the Academy of Munich has awarded this honour.

Ever since the lamented death of the Duke of Clarence it has been the wish of the Prince and Princess of Wales that his remains should find their last resting place at Sandringham, near to the home he loved so well. But the Queen, in her affectionate anxiety to ensure every mark of dignity and respect for her grandson, insisted that Windsor was the proper place of sepulture for one who stood so near the throne. We hear, however, that the mother's pleading has won over the Queen to her side, and that it is probable that although the sarcophagus will remain at Windsor, the body of the young Duke will be shortly removed to Sandringham.

The Duchess of Edinburgh and her daughters recently visited the Queen at Windsor Castle, before leaving England on their return to Germany. They go direct to Coburg, accompanied by the Duke, and will stay there until they proceed to Sigmaringen for the wedding of Princess Marie and the Crown Prince of Roumania, which is to take place there on Tuesday, January 10th. The Duke and Duchess will then go to Berlin, where they are to stay until after the wedding of Princess Margaret of Prussia and Prince Frederick of Hesse, which is to take place on Wednesday, January 25th. The Duke will then return to England to resume his command at Devonport, while the Duchess is to proceed to St. Petersburg for two months.

The ladies of Bucharest are going to have a beautiful casket made in Paris and put the cash into it; and this will be given to the bride after her marriage to do what she likes with, the donors requesting Her Royal Highness to select the charity to which she wishes the money to be applied.

STATISTICS.

TWENTY million acres of the land of the United States are held by Englishmen.

The population of America increases by seven thousand persons a day.

THERE are more than twenty boys under eighteen years of age in the British Army who have won the Victoria Cross for bravery.

THE total number of gold pieces struck at the Mint last year was 87,686,317, as against 70,894,445 in 1890. This was by far the largest number ever executed in one year, the value being £8,325,803 9s. 4d.

In order to replenish the ivory market of England, 15,000 elephants have to be killed every year. The annual slaughter of elephants amounts to 75,000. As the elephant does not begin to breed until it is thirty years old, and the average is one youngster every ten years until he is ninety, the extinction of the elephant is within measurable distance.

GEMS.

NEVER be cast down by trifles. If a spider breaks his thread twenty times, twenty times will he mend it again. Make up your mind to do a thing, and you will do it.

A FINISHED life—a life that has made the best of all the materials granted it, and through which, be its web dark or bright, its pattern clear or clouded, can be traced plainly the hand of the Great Designer—surely this is worth living for.

We mortals, men and women, devour many a disappointment between breakfast and dinner time, keep back the tears and look a little pale about the lips and keep silent. Pride helps us; and pride is not a bad thing when it only urges us to hide our own hurts—not to hurt others.

The only conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity is that he gives himself for a principle. Words, money, all things else, are comparatively easy to give away; but when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice, it is plain that the truth, whatever it may be, has taken possession of him.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PLAIN BISCUITS.—Make a stiff paste with 1 lb. of flour and the yolk of one egg well beaten up in a little milk, too much of which latter ingredient would make the biscuits heavy. Beat and knead till quite smooth, roll out thin, cut in fancy shapes, and bake, in a slow oven, from twelve to eighteen minutes.

TREACLE PUDDING.—½ lb. breadcrumbs, ½ lb. flour, ½ lb. suet, ½ teaspoonful ground ginger, ½ lb. treacle, ½ teaspoonful carbonate of soda, 2 eggs.—Cost, 6d. Chop the suet finely, beat the eggs, mix in the flour, breadcrumbs, ginger, soda, and lastly the treacle warmed; pour into a buttered basin, cover with buttered paper, and steam two hours.

AN authority says that in boiling macaroni it is fatal to permit it to stop boiling for a moment until done. Have plenty of salted water in the saucepan at the boiling point when the sticks are added, and when they are tender throw in a glass of cold water to stop the cooking suddenly, and drain at once. After that it may be served in various ways.

CURRIED HADDOCKS.—2 haddocks, 1 onion, 1 apple, ½ pint stock, 1 dessertspoonful curry powder, ½ lb. rice, 1 oz. butter, a little lemon-juice.—Cost, 11d. Skin and fillet the haddocks, cut in neat pieces, put the bones and skin into a saucepan with seasoning and ½ pint water, cut the onion and apple in slices, and fry them in the butter, add the curry powder, pour on the fish stock strained, stir till boiling, and simmer till the onion is quite soft and pulpy; add the fish, and simmer gently for 15 minutes; add the lemon-juice, put on a dish with a wall of rice.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE original pin was a fish-bone.

THE South Pole has never been reached.

THE average height of clouds is rather over a mile.

BLIND people are more numerous in Spain than in any other country.

THERE are fourteen different places on this globe where cannibalism is still practised.

A PHYSICIAN says practice at singing wards off consumption.

THERE are only about 150 foreigners in the British Army.

CHINESE streets are not often more than eight feet wide.

It is claimed that an electric plant has been discovered in India, which will influence a magnetic needle twenty-five feet distant.

THE highest point to which man can ascend without health being very seriously affected is 16,500 feet.

ACCORDING to European savants the sound made by flies, when heard through a microphone, is extremely like the neighing of a horse in the distance.

BIRDS of prey are able to look at the sun without being dazzled, because there is a membrane under their eyelids which they can draw down at will.

YELLOW stains left by sewing-machine oil on white, may be removed by rubbing the spot with a cloth wet with ammonia, before washing with soap.

THE healthiest spot in the world seems to be a little hamlet in France named Aumone. There are only forty inhabitants, twenty-three of whom are eighty years of age, and one is over one hundred.

WHATEVER may be said against the use of tobacco, it appears to be certain that it is a potent destroyer of disease germs, and the habitual smoker is well protected against various forms of infection.

A NOVEL way of illuminating a tunnel has been devised in Paris. Reflectors throw the light from many electric lamps sixteen feet above the rails to the sides of the tunnel, where it is again reflected by burnished tin, a soft and agreeable light. The trains automatically turn the current on and off in entering and leaving the tunnel.

THE London caddy and his passenger so often disagree over their fare that it might be worth while adopting a system used in several Lancashire towns. An indicator of fares is fixed in the cab, and when the passenger enters, the driver is bound to place the index at the fare due for the distance proposed, thus preventing all wrangling on reaching the goal.

A KITCHEN will be erected on the World's Fair grounds capable of feeding one hundred thousand hungry people at one time. Not all at one table, however. The kitchen will comprehend a number of restaurants, cafés, and luncheon places, where every desire of the human palate may be abundantly appeased. These cafés will be of varying grades suited to varying conditions of affluence.

A SWISS doctor claims to have found by experience a novel mode of relief in some affections of the throat and in case of earache. By making the patient yawn two or three times a day, the pain, he states, becomes distinctly lessened. In catarrh of the eustachian tube, the yawning by distending the muscles is said to act as a massage, and by this treatment the affection is frequently cut short.

THE pottery tree, found in Brazil, a curious and useful. One would scarcely expect to find pots and jars and pitchers growing in, if not on, a tree, but the material for them certainly grows in this tree. It is found in the form of silica, chiefly in the bark, although the very hard wood of the tree also yields it. To make this curious pottery the bark is burned, and what remains is ground to powder and mixed with clay.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MISTLETOE.—Christmas Day fell on a Sunday in 1887.
SCAMP.—You can remove whatever is your own.
E. T.—Manslaughter may be, and has been, punished by penal servitude for life.

RUFUS.—A tenant is liable for rent until his legal tenancy expires.

REGULAR READER.—A sentence on a prisoner dates from the day the court opens.

QUARELSOME.—The City of Birmingham is in three counties, Warwick, Worcester and Stafford.

TWO PRETTY GIRLS.—November 26, 1873, was a Wednesday; and January 7, 1888, was a Tuesday.

TOM THUMB.—There is no regiment would take you at your present height.

DUFFER.—The name of the River Rea is pronounced as if spelt "Ray."

G. H.—Contracts between trades unions and their members are not enforceable by law.

MARCIA.—Income tax and property tax are the same thing.

HUMILITY.—It is in bad taste and in many cases absolutely impertinent and always ill-bred.

P. R.—John Howard, the prison reformer, died in January, 1799.

AN INQUIRER.—We have seen no statement to the effect mentioned.

ADMIRER.—We are unable to give you the name of any such publication.

BORROWING LINA.—The 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles are at Jubbulpore, Bengal.

SIXTEEN YEARS' READER.—As far as we can understand your question we should say decidedly not.

HENRIETTA.—There is no other remedy but to pluck them out by the roots with a pair of tweezers as they appear.

ANXIOUS.—If a married woman insures her husband's life at her own cost the husband has no power whatever over the insurance money.

A SOLDIER'S LASS.—The soldier is not permitted to wear civilian's clothes at any time, and does so at the risk of being court-martialled for it.

BADETTE.—The saraband is a Spanish dance in slow and very marked time. The name also is applied to the music.

NEIGHBOUR.—The owner of the fence must keep it in repair; but the owner of the cattle must prevent his cattle from straying.

PERPLEXITY.—According to your statement there must be something wrong; you had better at once state the case to a lawyer, and take his advice.

GUNNER.—School Board can insist on the attendance at school of children from five years and until they are fourteen, or pass in Fifth Standard.

JUSTICE.—A month's imprisonment runs from the date of conviction to the same date in the following month.

JIM'S DARLING.—First battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers are at Devonport; the second at Meen Meer, Bengal.

BLUE RIBBON.—Port is in fact one of the most intoxicating wines, and no true teetotaler should permit himself even to smell it.

GAURIE.—The harvest moon is the moon which falls about the time of the autumnal equinox—that is, in September. The name is of British origin.

DANDY.—Nothing so good as a small pocket pair of scissors to keep the moustache regularly trimmed; all waxes and starch dressings are so much.

BALLY.—Abergavenny is in Monmouthshire, an English county included in Wales for certain local government purposes.

DAVID.—The depot of the 11th Hussars is at Canterbury; ascertain regarding recruiting from nearest Volunteer drill sergeant.

TOP.—There is no assisted emigration to the Cape, but there are brightening prospects there for those who are able to pay their way out.

CALIBAN.—The present Bishop of London is Dr. Temple, formerly Bishop of Exeter, and previously head master of Rugby.

M. R.—You should never part with original testimonials; but if it was addressed to you, and not to your employer, you have a right to claim its return.

C. C.—There is no recruiting in this country for Cape Mounted Rifles, consequently no place to which you can apply.

EVILYN.—The word "outré" is pronounced "co-tray," and "gauche" is pronounced "goash"—one syllable, with the vowel sound of "o" in "go."

TRAVELLER.—No; the mother of an illegitimate child is its only legal guardian; the reputed father has no claim to its custody, or any control over it whatever.

DISTRESSED FATHER.—You are under no obligation to find a home for a son twenty-five years of age; but should he come on the parish the guardians may have a claim upon you.

A NEW SERIAL STORY

BY A WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR OF CONSIDERABLE REPUTE, ENTITLED

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY,

WILL BE COMMENCED IN No. 1551, PUBLISHED ON JAN. 10TH, 1893.

* * We can confidently recommend this Story to our Readers as one of absorbing interest.

G. S. Y.—You are too late for this year; most of the passenger boats are laid up; about the beginning of March send in application to the "managers" of the Allan and Anchor Lines, stating your qualifications.

LADY CHATTERLEY.—As the consent of the commanding officer has to be obtained to the release of the man, it remains with him also to say whether he shall return to barracks to be discharged.

A FRIEND IN NEED.—The facts as stated by you would entitle the husband to a divorce; and there are means by which a poor man may proceed at very little cost; but it can only be done through a solicitor.

B. A.—The total number of regular forces at home and abroad in the British Army is roughly 144,000; with reserves, militia, volunteers, &c., the total foots up to 708,000 of all ranks.

A LOVER OF BIRDS.—The canary bird got its name from the Canary Islands, though it is thought by some to belong to Africa, it having escaped in a ship from that country.

H. A. W.—The Hernici were an ancient people of Central Italy. They are often mentioned in the early history of Rome, by whose power they were finally subdued.

DOMESTICITY.—You can get the paint off the glass by rubbing it with a strong solution of soda in warm water; or you may loosen it with paraffin oil or naphtha; but the soda is preferable.

LIPS AND EYES.

SOMETIMES her eyes become so kind
 That in their depths I seem
 To see encouragement to hope
 Fulfillment of my dream.
 But this fair maid is so perverse
 That, if I dare to grow
 Too hopeful, though her eyes say "Yes,"
 Her saucy lips say "No."
 At other times her words are kind,
 But then her eyes are dumb;
 Still, if my prayers avail, some day
 My happiness will come.
 For, since I know with her alone
 It lies my life to bless,
 I hourly pray that lips and eyes
 May some time both say—"Yes."

FROM THE COUNTRY.—The British Museum is open to the public daily from ten to four, but certain galleries are closed on Tuesdays and Thursdays. During certain months the hours are extended to five and six o'clock.

TRUSSARD.—Only one hussar regiment wore the loose jacket sleeve; the reason for the dress was that the regiment repelled a sudden attack when many of the soldiers had to fight partially clothed.

TROUBLE.—The law of the land is that on the expiration of the notice to quit the landlord can either eject you or raise your rent to any amount he likes. The fact that you cannot get another house does not affect the case at all.

TRAVELLER.—No duty will be charged on used blankets, but at least 3d. per lb. of value will be put upon new ones and on new wearing apparel; it is, however, open to you to put the suits on once or twice on the voyage and save the duty.

DORIS.—The "Roll Call," by Miss Thompson, is a fanciful picture; the personages are not real, but the sketch conveys in a very graphic manner an idea of at least one phase of glorious war in which the heroic struggles with the commonplace.

SCOT.—The "most distinguished man" at the Battle of Waterloo was undoubtedly the Duke of Wellington; there are no statistics to show which county in Scotland has yielded the greatest number of distinguished men in any profession.

MILLIE.—Glass or china with gold decorations should never be put into strong soapsuds or water with washing compounds. They should be washed with a sponge in clear water, and dried on soft linen cloths or with tissue paper. In this way the gold will never wear off.

BURRO.—The owl parrot is found in New Zealand. It has the general form of a parrot, with the facial expression, night habits, and noiseless flight of owls in general. In a work on owls it is stated as worthy of remark that "in all owls that fly by night the exterior edges and sides of the wing quills are slightly recurved, and end in fine hairs or points, by means of which the bird is enabled to pass through the air with the greatest silence—a provision necessary for enabling it the better to surprise its prey."

KANGOO.—The first trouble in making a draught-screen is the foundation or wooden frame; if you can't make that yourself it will be necessary to get a joiner to do it for you as cheaply as possible; next buy some black linen at a draper's—four yards for each leaf of the screen—stretch it upon the frame with tacks, and when that is done proceed to paste your pictures upon it.

AN UNHAPPY WIFE.—A magistrate's separation order does not authorize either of the parties to marry again. To do that a divorce must be obtained. To obtain a divorce the husband must prove adultery against the wife; or the wife must prove adultery and either desertion or cruelty against the husband. Only a lawyer can give any estimate of the cost of a divorce suit.

FAITH.—We cannot say that you acted either wisely or quite fairly in failing to go forward to demand your share, but you can now call upon your stepmother to count and reckon with you in court if necessary for your portion of your father's estate; you are entitled to an equal share with your brother to two-thirds of the available balance after all debts and charges were paid.

ANGELICA.—Hours is the name given to the imaginary beings whose company in the Mohammedan paradise is to form the principal felicity of the "believer." The name is derived from hur al ayun, signifying "black-eyed." They are represented in the Koran as most beautiful nymphs, endowed with immortal youth, and enjoying immunity from diseases of ordinary beings.

COCKNEY.—Fog is caused by a warm moist air being acted upon by a cold dry current; the cold causes the moisture in the warm air to condense and fall in the form of particles which collectively make fog; fog lies heavier on water because water yields up its heat quicker than land; fog rises as the upper air becomes warmer, and while this process is going on may be seen in mid-air.

C. Y.—The Emigrants' Information Office is at 31, Broadway, London, S.W., and they have repeatedly issued warnings to emigrants to keep away from Brazil, as neither climate nor country are at all suited to them; of course if you are going out as the employé of a British firm under an arrangement signed and sealed in this country, that is a very different thing; you may risk the climate without much dread of the result.

MAC.—MacCulloch is the surname of a very ancient family in Galloway whose origin is lost in antiquity; it is understood they are lineally descended from Ulvie, grandson of Olven Gullvus, King of the Clairdriens, or Strathclyde Britons, Ulvie and Douvald being vice-sovereigns of Galloway; the MacCullochs held Ulvie's land, and the McDowalls the portion over which Douvald held sway; there is no MacCulloch tartan; these were lowland clans.

MARQUEE.—If stamp placed upside down on the top left-hand corner, that means—"The writer loves you." Crosswise, same corner—"My heart belongs to another and can never be yours." Proper way, same corner—"Good-bye for the present, dearest." At right angle, same corner—"I hate you." Bottom left-hand corner, same way—"I wish your friendship, but no more." Upside down, same corner—"Write soon." If put on a line with the surname on left-hand side—"Accept my love." Upside down, same position—"I am already engaged." Upside down, right-hand corner—"My heart is another's. Write no more." Crosswise, same corner—"Do you love me, dearest?" Right-hand side of surname, proper way—"I long to see you. Write immediately." Bottom right-hand corner, upside down—"Yes." Bottom right corner, proper way—"Business correspondence." No stamp means great indignation on the part of the receiver, with twopenny to pay in addition.

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